

The Tymorean Trust

Book One

Power Rising

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This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales are purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

PLEASE NOTE

I use Australian spelling throughout. You will see ou's (colour) and 'ise' not 'ize' (realise) as well as a few other differences to American spelling.

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Prologue

Death Prophecy of the Tymorean Elder Dakven
As told to Professor Governor Xyron

Year 985 of the Seventh Great Age – Tymorean calendar
Chaos is increasing –
the Age of the Great Ones Lorno, Joshe and Tormel is coming to an end.
Dire times are coming to worlds in all parts of the universe.
Treachery is rife – even on our world.
Those who are to come...are but seeds of peace on a distant world.
We must find them...before they become our enemy...before hope is lost.

Chapter 1 - Power Erupts

Tim Ward strode down the crowded corridor from near the staff offices to his locker with a scowl on his face. He ignored the occasional 'hello' from friends, and shoved against anyone that got in his way. That earned him a few curses from ones who stumbled into other people.

At his locker, one of many that lined both sides of passage, he fetched his pencil case and science books, then slammed the locker door shut. His classmates stayed tactfully quiet. The few that knew that Ted Rogers had cited him for a breach of rules, understood his anger.

Swirling around in Tim's mind was the injustice of the affair. "So I took Marco's ball off him! So what? He has been needling me for weeks, ever since he was put off the basketball team. That wasn't my fault," he was thinking. "I just threw it away from him, for heavens sake, so he'd leave me alone.

I could have punched him, but I didn't."

The memory of the confrontation was still vivid, the memory of the anger still simmering. "Marco didn't have to go and tell lies about me. I wasn't trying to get him into trouble. I never thought I could throw a ball that far, didn't think it could possibly break a window and get it stuck on the roof. It was an accident. So why did Rogers come down on me like I did it on purpose?"

The crowds in the corridor thinned out as students went to their mid-session classes. Tim, realised he was still staring at his locker, and jerked around. Rogers had him for science and if he were late, the bastard would have another go at him. Then he probably wouldn't have just one lunchtime detention, but a week of it. With a renewal of his scowl, Tim headed for the science lab – dreading the next hour and a half of being under Rogers' eye.

Tim trailed in with the last of the class, keeping his classmates between him and his teacher, and moving past the trolley of glassware to get to the back row of benches. He made an effort to calm himself. Rogers was too much of a martinet to take the slightest misbehaviour in his class. You didn't want to get on his bad side, and since he already was, Tim didn't want to make it worse. He put his books on the bench and pulled out the stool.

"Ward, I want you up the front," Rogers announced, without looking his way. "Is your sister here?"

Tim glanced around, surprised by the question. “No. Why?”

“I want you both where I can see you,” Rogers said, coming to stand near where Tim had intended to sit, and looking like staying there until he moved.

Tim tried to outstare him, but Rogers stayed where he was. The tableau was broken when the hanging screen for the projector suddenly retracted with explosive force. Rogers glanced away, and Tim picked up his things, and released some anger by kicking the stool out of his way. He hadn’t meant to kick it hard, but it fell over. Rogers glared at him until he picked it up.

Meeting the teacher’s implacable gaze triggered a wild uncontrollable fury in Tim’s mind. He spun around, free arm flying out. The sound of breaking glass and the abrupt silence of all other noise snapped him back to awareness. He stared at the tray of glassware now on the green tile floor at his feet, and his books dropped from his grasp. All the energy drained from him as if he had been drenched with icy water.

“Mr Ward, put your books on the front table, and clean up that mess. We will discuss this at the end of class.” Rogers waited to see if Tim obeyed his instruction.

The teacher’s voice had been tightly controlled, had sounded almost matter of fact, but Tim looked at his teacher, and saw the tight lips and flushed face. He bent down and collected his books and pencil case, rose and walked rigidly to the front where he put his stuff with deliberate neatness on the front bench. When he turned to walk to get the broom, Rogers began the lesson, and all but one or two of the students stopped watching him and settled uncomfortably to listen.

Cindy Ward slammed her locker door shut, rattling the entire row of similar, gunmetal gray painted metal doors. The sound echoed down the deserted corridor. She did not consider that it might disturb the lessons that had started ten minutes ago.

In fact, the familiar row of alternating book and coat lockers now seemed like something alien and strange. She rested her head against the metal and felt it cool against her skin, for a moment tried to recall what she had been doing, and where she was.

Behind and above the lockers were windows and through them, Cindy could see sunshine and a blue sky and the trees in the yard next to the school bending in a strong breeze.

“I don’t belong here,” Cindy muttered to herself, feeling trapped, but not knowing why. She began to back away from the lockers towards the glass doors leading outside. Her eyes were on the trees, her mind wanted to feel the breeze cooling her flushed face. Her ears only heard a buzzing noise.

In an unconscious gesture, she ran her fingers through her long brown hair. The result was no improvement to the original unbrushed light brown tangle and a strand fell back over her face. She turned and headed for the door, saw movement in the corner of her eye and hurried her pace. The door didn’t seem to want to open; she rattled it and tried again. Then she kicked it angrily.

“Cindy! Why aren’t you in class?”

The voice of the school’s Deputy Principal, Dan Ward, made her turn around. Some of the alien feeling went away and she remembered where she was.

“Don’t stress, Dad! I just need to go outside.”

“You were told to come to the office,” Dan Ward told her harshly, walking closer. He was a tall man, in his early forties with tidy brown hair, and dressed on the formal side of casual.

Cindy moved her focus to a stain on the roof a short distance beyond her father. She knew it would irritate him.

“Who said so?” she asked rudely, as she realised she could even see the fine texture of the roof tiles.

“Ted Rogers told you to get down from the roof of ‘C’ block,” Dan Ward told her sternly. Cindy interrupted him with a quick glance back to his face.

“I was just getting the basketball down. Someone had to do it.”

Cindy looked down and hid her smirk. She was still simmering with anger at Roger's very public dressing down. Instead of listening to it, she had walked off, and made sure he couldn't find her for the rest of recess.

Ward's face tightened. "Students are not allowed to climb onto the roof. And you disobeyed a direct instruction given to you by a teacher – and you were extremely rude to him."

"I was doing it – getting down," Cindy told her father.

"Just because I teach here," Ward began warningly. "It does not mean that you and Tim have a right to disregard the behaviour standards expected of all students."

Cindy jerked her head up and glared at her father. "He had no right to yell at me in front of everyone."

Dan Ward's expression became cold. "Get to your class!" he told her coldly. "Consider this an official warning!"

With a dismissive stare, Cindy jammed her fists into the pockets of her school jacket and turned her back on her father. She walked at a deliberately unhurried pace down the deserted corridor and into the passage leading to Science Lab One.

She slipped through the partly opened doorway and slid into her normal seat at the nearest bench. As she shrugged out of her jacket, she noticed her brother was sweeping up a pile of broken glassware. For an instant, their eyes met. Cindy glanced at Rogers and back. Tim scowled and copied her gesture.

Mr. Rogers, the Science teacher, was writing on the whiteboard. An overhead projector reflected carefully drawn molecular structures onto the wall.

"It is nice of you to join us, Miss Ward!" Rogers said loudly as he turned from the whiteboard to face his class. "Come up to the front table please. Your brother will be joining you when he has finished cleaning up his act of vandalism!"

As she stood, grabbing her jacket, she said audibly, "I won't have missed much."

Roger's expression tightened as Cindy strolled to the indicated place. The front seats were usually left vacant because no one liked being right underneath his eye. She settled herself on the seat next to where her brother's books were placed on the bench. She was aware that he had finished sweeping and was about to join her.

"Step out of line one more time today, Mr Ward, Miss Ward, and you will both be back here for an hour after school." Rogers warned them. "And it appears that you will need to share your book and working materials, Mr Ward, as your sister doesn't consider it necessary to provide her own."

Tim eyed the teacher warily. The intense irritation that had caused him to send the tray of glassware crashing to the floor had waned. He made an effort to concentrate on the lesson even though his mind now felt sluggish. He knew he could not afford detention today – he had a scout meeting after school.

"Mr. Avery, would you tell Miss Ward the question I put to the class before she deigned to join us?"

Paul Avery, sitting at the table next to Tim's, looked up in panic. "I...er..."

"Mr. Jacobs?" Rogers turned his attention to the next student along.

"What sort of compound is formed by an acid-base reaction?" Ed Jacobs rattled off in a not too subtle imitation of Roger's pedantic tone.

"Well, you do listen occasionally, Mister Jacobs. Please open your books at Chapter Seven."

Tim opened his book without checking the place and pushed it nearer his twin, and passed two sheets of paper to her. When Rogers began to dictate notes, Tim opened his notebook and wrote in his usual neat script but he could not have said what he was writing.

Cindy stared at Mr. Rogers as he moved about the room. Her hand fiddled with the borrowed pen but she was not writing. Her eyes seemed to be making the teacher's face change

from long and narrow to round like a ball. The voice of Mr Rogers was merely a buzzing in her head and the information she was hearing was going into memory without her mind processing it.

Tim Ward was only vaguely aware that Rogers had already given two students detention for messy work. He was relieved that Rogers found nothing wrong with his own.

“Miss Ward!”

Both of the twins looked up and Rogers saw a blank expression on each face. The resemblance between them was strong.

“What have I been saying?”

“When an acid is neutralized by a base, you get water and a salt. Thus when sodium hydroxide is mixed ...” Cindy repeated verbatim the half page of notes that Rogers had dictated.

Several students snickered, but they stopped abruptly when Rogers glared in their direction.

“I will have your company back here after last lesson, Miss Ward. It will be interesting to see if you can still remember everything then.”

Cindy gave no reaction, except to stare at Rogers until he turned to resume dictating.

“Is your sister’s lack of attention contagious Mr. Ward?” Rogers asked, noticing that Tim had stopped writing.

Tim looked at his hand as if it belonged to a stranger, and said nothing. He forgot the question as his mind tried to understand why his hands looked mauve. He didn’t seem to hear the instruction about joining his sister for detention.

“Someone should go and punch him in the face,” Paul Avery muttered darkly, glaring at Rogers after he had moved away. He too had detention after school.

After a moment, Tim stood up and followed the teacher to the front of the room. Rogers turned, hearing footsteps and only had time to say “What...” before a hard punch landed in his face and knocked him backwards.

Rogers regained his balance quickly. In a fluid movement, he grabbed Tim with one hand, pulled him to the door that he opened it with his other hand. He pushed Tim out into the corridor with enough force to send him stumbling into the far wall. He followed his student out.

“You will go – to Mr. Howard’s office – and wait for me!” he said with emphasis, pulling a neatly pressed handkerchief from his jacket pocket to wipe blood from his nose. As he turned to return to the classroom, he noticed the lights were flickering as Cindy erupted from the room.

“Leave my brother alone,” she screamed coming at him.

Rogers had no chance to react before Cindy began hitting him. He was, for a moment, so angry he was unable to speak. Without a further word, he grasped Cindy’s arm and propelled her across the corridor to join her brother.

“Both of you – up to the Office – now!” Rogers finally articulated. In his state of suppressed rage, he noticed that both Tim and Cindy looked frightened. He told himself that they ought to be scared. They were in serious trouble. Their father might be the deputy principal, but that would not protect them from being suspended or expelled. He watched as they backed away from him towards the door leading outside.

His class greeted his return with whispers and stunned, frightened looks.

“I will return shortly,” Rogers told his class in a tightly controlled voice. “In my absence you will proceed to answer the questions at the end of Chapter Seven. When I come back, if I hear talking, whispering or any noise at all – the whole class will have detention every night until the end of term!”

Mouths snapped shut, heads bent over work as Rogers stalked from the room. The scratching of pens and the ticking of the clock seemed very loud.

Tim only walked as far as the concrete steps outside the door. The reality of his actions finally hit him and he grabbed the handrail and slumped onto the top step. Cindy, with the instinctive empathy she shared with her twin, sat down beside him.

“Why did I do it, Sis? How could I have done it?” Tim asked aloud, but his mind was blank. He was oblivious to the strong breeze blowing in his face and the scudding clouds that were racing overhead. He had even forgotten he should be going to the Principal’s Office as he absently rubbed the elbow that had hit the corridor wall.

“You shouldn’t have started yelling at him, Cindy.”

“I couldn’t help it, Tim,” Cindy said in a smaller voice than usual. “I felt as if he was touching me! I was so angry...”

Cindy swallowed convulsively, trying not to be sick. The incredible fury that had erupted within her as Rogers pushed Tim from the room had cooled, but the memory made her nauseous.

She and Tim had gone past merely rude. What was happening to them, to make them do such a thing as attacking a teacher? Why was every little commonplace thing making them irritated? Why were they reacting so violently? The buzzing in her head made it difficult to think.

Chapter 2 - The Children of Prophecy

“Tim! Cindy!”

The sharp voice visibly startled the twins. They sprang to their feet and as if responding to a threat, twirled to face the voice. Their eyes took in the school blazer and the school captain’s badge and finally recognition dawned. Keith Rasmussen, the school’s senior student leader had come, unheard, out of the door behind them.

The breeze now blowing from behind them gusted strongly. Both Tim and Cindy grabbed the nearest stair rail and began to back down the stairs.

“Mr. Howard is expecting you!” he told them grimly. “Come on! It is no use dawdling any more. Ted Rogers is livid. What the hell did you do?”

“I ...hit him,” Tim said in a voice devoid of emotion. His eyes were blank of expression.

Keith, about to move down the steps, stopped. The admission appalled him. Tim and his sister were two of the school’s top students in both sport and academics...

He stopped the thought, admitting to himself that Tim and his sister had been acting disagreeably for several weeks. They were his friends though, and seeing the extreme pallor of their faces, he knew that his sympathy was not with the outraged teacher.

“Come on,” he repeated more gently. “You have to come to the Office.”

“F--- off! We’ll get there,” Tim swore, as he turned to descend the steps.

“Okay, no stress,” Keith said in as calm a voice as he could manage. He held his hands up in an ‘I don’t intend to hurt you’ gesture.

Cindy stared at him blankly for a moment and then turned to follow her brother. The blankness in both sets of blue-green eyes gave Keith shivers. “Are you guys on something?” he asked as he began to follow them.

“No!” Cindy shouted over her shoulder as she ambled after her brother who showed no inclination to go fast.

Keith followed them with impatience. If they didn’t hurry, Principal Howard was going to be angry with them. He moved forward and nudged them both. Tim snarled, sounding like a feral animal; Cindy turned and struck his arm with hers. It hurt him so much he was sure he’d get a bruise, but she seemed to feel nothing and her blank expression had not changed.

Talk about a strange mood, Keith thought to himself. I wouldn’t like to have Ted Rogers appear just now. Whatever had the teacher had done to provoke these two into attacking him? Though the way Tim and Cindy were now, it may not have taken much at all. Rogers could be irritating, Keith knew that all too well, but even so, there was no excuse for hitting a teacher.

From dawdling, Tim and Cindy were now walking very fast. Keith realised that he needed to speed up and thought to himself that their behaviour made no sense. They had to be on drugs – maybe a mixture.

He saw Cindy stumble. Tim seemed not to notice that his sister was lying on the ground. Keith came up and offered Cindy his hand, “Here let me help you up.”

Cindy rolled onto her back, and reached up for his hand. Keith gripped it and almost lost his balance when she yanked on it. Her eyes still seemed blank and cold.

Without seeming to hurry, Cindy caught up to her brother. Keith followed closely, and saw them stop suddenly outside the principal’s office.

Keith reached around them and knocked on the wood panelled door. There was no sound within, so he guessed that Ted Rogers had been calmed down enough to return to his class. Certainly, his shouting had been audible down the corridor to the library. A soft voice from within bade them to enter but neither Tim nor Cindy moved. Keith reached around them to open the door then nudged them. He feared another violent response, but they both stumbled

slightly and moved forward. He pushed them gently towards the two chairs that faced the headmaster.

Tony Howard was sitting behind his modern brown wood desk, which contained only a neat pile of the day's correspondence. Keith had never seen the Headmaster's expression so severe. He normally had a pleasant smile that put people at ease.

He wondered if he should tell Howard about the twins' odd behaviour on the way to the office, but he did not know what to say.

"I'll have a word with you later, Keith," Howard remarked quietly. "But you can leave things in my hands for now."

Keith obeyed Howard's tacit dismissal and walked back to his interrupted study in a very thoughtful mood. He knew the headmaster was a fair man but...damn it, Tim and Cindy weren't their normal selves at the moment.

Howard studied the twins. Shock was probably an apt description for what he observed in the two children now slumped in the chairs. Neither Tim nor Cindy had ever been in serious trouble and, until now, he had been satisfied to let their father handle their recent misbehaviour. However, it was not petty mischief or mere rudeness anymore.

Ted Rogers had been in a righteous fury, but he had been scrupulously truthful as he reported on the incident. He even admitted he had begun to dislike both students, who lately seemed to think they knew everything, and could learn nothing more in his science class.

It had taken a lot of diplomacy on Howard's part to dissipate the fury enough to allow Rogers to return to his class.

Howard continued to study the two students. There was no evidence of the false bravado that the few habitual troublemakers exuded or even of the defiance that Rogers had mentioned. Tim and Cindy Ward kept their eyes downcast.

"I would like to know what happened!" Howard said sternly. Something in his voice drew their eyes to meet his, but their gaze was blank.

"Tim?" he prompted when neither spoke.

"I punched Mr. Rogers, Sir," Tim sounded honestly bewildered, his voice hoarse. "I know I was angry earlier but I don't know why I hit him."

Howard frowned slightly.

"Cindy?"

"When Mr. Rogers began to get rough with Tim, it felt like he was handling me. I was so angry then but now I think I want to be sick. I have been feeling strange all morning - angry and fidgety. My head seems to be buzzing; my eyes keep going in and out of focus and my hands look kind of mauve."

Tony Howard was so startled at her unexpected words that he had begun to stand up before he realized what he was doing. He continued the movement as it enabled him to see Cindy's hands and Tim's also. His eyes narrowed cutting out some of the brightness coming in from the window behind him. Yes, there was indeed a mauve glow about the hands.

"I will need to talk to you both some more," Howard told them sternly. "I want you to wait here quietly."

Howard calmed his mind as he left his office. He needed to keep his reactions under control. It was imperative, because if his guess was correct, the two children in his office would react to ambient emotions.

He stopped for a moment after closing his office door. What he had just seen, added to how the children had been behaving...the signs were unmistakable, but difficult for him to believe.

"Why?" he asked himself. "Why were these two students, now showing signs of a kind of power that belonged to his kinfolk on Tymorea, a planet halfway across the inhabited universe?"

Howard began to cross the common area thinking, "It shouldn't be possible. Dan Ward wasn't a Tymorean, nor was either of his parents. Moreover, as far as Howard knew, Dan's late wife had not been either. Even if one or other had been Tymorean, the children still should not be showing signs of this power. Admittedly, Tim and Cindy were intelligent, and physically more adept than others their age but this shouldn't be happening.

Then a fragment of memory surfaced. He recalled mention that some rare Tymoreans were catalysts, people able to activate latent power in others. Could some humans have the same effect? An idea for later. Right now, he needed help to deal with the children. Fortunately, there was another Tymorean nearby who was even more powerful than he was.

Knowing that his deputy had just left to go to a seminar in the city, Howard went to use the phone in Dan Ward's office. As he lifted the receiver and dialed, he stared at the small framed photo of Janelle Ward who had died six years ago. Dan had left a high paid research position to become a teacher when he had become a single parent.

His first call was answered quickly. All he said was, "I need you at my school, Vincent."

His fellow Tymorean, who was also a psychologist, merely answered, "Coming right away."

Howard's second call was to Dan Ward's mobile phone. He heard traffic noise in the background as Dan answered.

"Daniel, sorry to recall you, but I have a serious situation here and need you back."

After a pause, Dan answered, tensely, "Right, Tony, on my way."

For a few moments, Howard sat staring at the neat book-filled shelves next to the door, which were mostly bound journals and science texts. He rose abruptly to return to the children in his office. He shouldn't leave them alone for long.

Tim and Cindy tensed when the door behind them re-opened, but they did not look around. They watched him as he walked back to and around his desk.

His young looking face wore a serious expression.

"Your father is on his way back. I expect that you realize what a difficult position you have put him in!"

"Yes, Sir," Tim answered he had the look of a cornered animal, wanting to flee but too scared to move. "Are we going to be expelled?"

"That will depend on a number of factors," Howard admitted truthfully. "A two week suspension is the least of it."

Howard tried to question them further. "Are you taking any medication or food supplements?" Neither Tim nor Cindy seemed inclined to answer him. Both seemed to want to vanish into their seats. Instead of pressing more questions on them, he sat observing them until the reception office called to say the psychologist had arrived.

Tony Howard went to the schools reception desk to greet Vincent, who was both a friend and a distant cousin. The psychologist wasted no time on greetings, knowing that the reason for being summoned must be serious. He strode down the passage with Howard giving him a low voiced summary of the two children in his office. Vincent increased his pace, hearing noises coming from the room ahead that boded ill.

Vincent entered the room first, moving aside to let Howard follow and close the door. Neither

commented as Tim systematically swiped books from Howard's shelves and Cindy was kicked papers around the carpeted floor that had once been neat piles of correspondence on the desk.

"Have you a dampening field on in here?" Vincent asked quietly.

"Yes. I needed it earlier to calm one of my teachers. These two were quiet enough when I went to meet you."

"Well, they are getting energy from somewhere. Are the lights normally this dim in here?"

Howard glanced up. With the sun coming in from outside being so bright, he hadn't noticed the room lights.

"No." Then he changed the volume and tone of his voice and commanded. "Tim, Cindy, you will both sit down!"

Both Tim and Cindy stopped moving and then, like automatons, they returned to the chairs and began to stare straight ahead.

Vincent said quietly to Howard, "Their higher cognitive functions are not operating, and they are reacting to the sense of needing to do something. The glow has spread from their hands up to their shoulders. Would you turn the electric lights off in here?"

He gently touched the face of each child in turn. Some colour came back into their faces and the glow around their arms faded.

"Your observations and conclusions are right on the mark, Tony," Vincent told his friend after a few more minutes of observation. "They are indeed showing classic symptoms of Delayed Onset Syndrome. Leave them with me for a while. When Daniel returns, bring him in."

Dan Ward walked into his office feeling as tense as a coiled spring. He looked as if he had prepared himself for bad news. He sat stiffly in a spare chair so he could face his superior who had usurped his office.

Howard rose from behind Dan's desk and walked to close the door. He returned to the seat behind the desk and as gently as possible, related the recent events. Dan Ward betrayed nothing of his feelings.

"I feared something like this," Dan told his superior with a degree of resignation.

"How long has such behaviour been going on?" Howard asked. "I know you've been dealing with some of it here."

"The rudeness, the disobedience, the thoughtlessness, the rebelliousness ... probably close to a month," Dan said distractedly. "It's been getting worse. Last weekend when they were out with an orienteering group, they decided to free climb up a sheer cliff face. They were half way up before the group leader realised it."

"Maybe I should have intervened sooner," Tony Howard murmured. "However, I believe I know the cause of their problem..." he held up his hand to forestall interruptions "I have heard of such situations before. I took the liberty of calling in an excellent psychologist, who knows how to treat this type of behaviour. He is with your children now and will be able to explain all this better than I can."

Dan rose abruptly. "I want to talk to him."

Vincent rose from Howard's chair as Dan Ward entered.

"Daniel, I am Vincent. I expect Tony has explained that I am a psychologist?"

Dan nodded and shook hands with the doctor. He felt the same instinctive trust for this stranger as he had for his friend, Tony Howard.

Then Dan looked at his children. Neither seemed aware of him.

Howard moved another chair near his desk. He himself elected to stand beside the dark haired Vincent. The resemblance between them was noticeable even though Howard's hair was blond and Vincent's was black.

"What is all this about? What is the matter with them? What aren't you telling me?" Dan was beginning to feel very odd himself – somewhat light headed. He needed to sit down.

"I am going to tell you something that is not generally known," Vincent began, watching Dan carefully. "And I am doing so because I must have your permission to treat these children. I

am not just a psychologist; I am also a Tymorean missionary. I was born on Tymorea a planet that is a long way from here.”

“What do you mean? You’re an alien? Is this a joke?”

“No, Daniel, this is not a joke. Please listen to me as I explain. On my world, the rulers are born with a special kind of power, a gift they use for the good of our people. I have some of it; so does my friend Tony Howard. Your children – for reasons unknown, have inherited the same power. They do not know how to handle it and that is the underlying cause of today’s events. The sooner we start to teach them, the better.”

In fact, Vincent knew it was imperative to begin at once but he could not rush his explanation. Dan Ward had to agree and the light trance he had imposed on the man was slowing his thinking.

“Why is this happening to my children?” Dan asked, bewildered. “Is it something I did wrong?”

“Daniel, I don’t know why this has happened. Maybe my brother, Governor Xyron, could tell you. All I know is that your grandfather and mother-in-law were missionaries of ours. You would not know this because normally, the progeny of mixed marriages do not inherit Tymorean powers and we do not need to tell our children of our origins.”

“In this case we had to reveal ourselves to you, because your children must go to Tymorea. We can’t train them here,” Tony Howard explained.

Dan nodded, and looked thoughtfully at Howard and Vincent. They didn’t look alien; couldn’t be too different if they could breed with Earth people. He shook his head to try to think more clearly. “They can’t go on as they are. I don’t recognise them any more.”

“I don’t want to go anywhere!” Cindy blurted. She tried to rise from the chair, but fell back. “I don’t.”

Vincent stood up again and came around the desk. He walked to where Cindy sat and gently touched her cheek. “It is necessary young one,” he said quietly and Cindy subsided. “If your illness goes untreated it will cause you to harm the people you care for.”

Dan saw Cindy shudder at the thought.

“If you resume those calming exercises that I taught you – you will begin to feel a lot better.”

Vincent watched Cindy for a moment, and then turned his attention back to Dan.

Dan Ward heard himself say, “Something has to be done and nothing I have tried has worked. I cannot help them. Tony recommended you and I trust his judgement. Do what is necessary.”

“Thank you, Daniel. Please stay with your children until I return. I have a few more matters to attend to before I leave.”

Vincent waited until after the lunch break before calling up his driver to bring his van closer to the administration entrance. The children were docile now that he had grounded out their excess energy and blocked their access to more. He had no illusions about what might happen once they emerged from Howard’s shielded office. If they had been able to draw energy from the school’s electrical system, they might be able to draw it from sunlight or even the wind. There had been some very odd gusts of wind earlier.

The only way to prevent that was to knock them out, but he didn’t want them to be seen leaving the school on stretchers. Better it just seem that they were being sent home. Having Dan Ward walking out with them would aid that idea.

Tony, warned to be ready if Tim began to resist going outside, increased his grip on the boy’s arm. Dan wasn’t expecting trouble from Cindy however, and she wrenched herself free from his gentle grip. Vincent was watching her and caught her arm before she got more than two

steps away. In that moment of touching, he felt a jolt of energy. Cindy only seemed to stumble slightly, and Dan was unaware of a problem.

Vincent didn't have to voice the urgency of getting these children into his van. Just looking at Tony, it was apparent he was feeling the steady trickle of excess power grounding through him.

Without seeming to hurry, Vincent directed Tim and Cindy to couches slung down each side of the rear of his van. Howard caught his glance that was a suggestion of getting Dan Ward out of the way.

As soon as the other men had gone, Vincent closed the doors from inside and took a palm-sized device from a small locker near the door. In moments, he had touched the device to each child's arm and injected a fast acting sedative.

Once it had taken effect, he covered and secured the children onto the couches. He rapped on the partition backing the driver's cabin and a sliding panel opened.

"Back to the clinic, please John."

Dan Ward was aware that Howard waited with him as the van drove away. It had looked like a large ambulance inside, but the outside was plain white and the only windows were in the rear door. He had only glimpsed the driver through the driver's window, and he had seemed to be in normal clothes. Any observers would not learn much from the vehicle's appearance.

When the van had passed out of the school gate, Dan began to shiver, and his mind to fill with misgivings. Then he recalled how Vincent had merely had to touch his children gently to induce calm in them. Had he done something similar to him? He must have, for while part of his mind was relieved that the psychologist could indeed manage his children the other part was telling him that he was a fool to be calmly handing his children over to a complete stranger.

Howard walked with his friend and deputy until Dan re-entered his office. He intended to follow but detoured to his own office first.

He knew that some reaction to the morning's events would be inevitable, so he collected a small bottle of strong spirits and two small tumblers. Drinking alcohol at the school was strictly against the rules but Howard felt it was justified at this time. He walked uninvited into Dan's office and closed the door for privacy. Then he poured two small drinks. Dan Ward appeared to be staring out the window to where two classes were now involved in a football match.

Howard watched the play of emotions crossing his deputy's face as he pressed the tumbler into his hand. Dan acknowledged the drink with a brief nod and downed it quickly. He handed the glass back but made no move for a refill, nor made any effort to speak. He returned to staring out of the window. The headmaster sat quietly in the spare chair and waited. The sun shone in through the window and Dan was oblivious to it. Fortunately, Dan's afternoon lessons were covered since he should have been at a seminar.

"Dan?" Howard spoke quietly.

"I appreciate your presence, Tony," Dan answered at once, though he didn't turn around. "My mind is going in circles - I cannot understand how I can be so accepting of the fantastic story you told me, but something inside me knows it is true. It is like I have remembered something I had forgotten."

"I appreciate your continued trust, my friend." Howard admitted. "I was surprised when Vincent mentioned that you were related to us. Your Grandfather, was he the one who raised you?"

"Yes, but I never had much to do with my mother-in-law. Janelle was never her mother's idea of a dutiful daughter. Tell me about your home world Tony."

"It is a lot like Earth. We have a high level of technology, but most people do not make use of it. The gravity is slightly higher than here. Did Vincent invite you around to his clinic?"

"He said he would call me. Why?" Dan asked.

“You must have many questions, Dan. I’ll answer them if I can but I am only a headmaster. Vincent is the scientist, so save the highly technical questions for him. Ask me simple ones.”

“Simple, hmm!” Dan had begun to relax. “Okay, why are your people interested in this world?”

Howard took a moment to organize his thoughts. Dan deserved the best answer he could give him.

“My people, Tymoreans, revere the Guardians of Peace. In our history, they made our world a guardian planet. We live by the principle that, ‘When there is peace on Tymorea, there is peace in the universe’.”

Dan turned and leant his back against the windowsill. “So, you come to other worlds?” he said, “As missionaries, Vincent said.”

“Observers really,” Tony explained. “We come and blend into the population, sometimes marry. In times of war, we often choose to help the cause of peace.”

“Where does this power you mentioned come into it?” Dan asked. He still didn’t understand about that. “Your rulers have it and my children do. But where does it come from?”

“At the dawn of our history, when the Guardians of Peace gave us the Trust, they bestowed gifts of power on three great leaders,” Howard explained, trying to be clear. “These three formed the first Triumvirate, and the power was inherited by their children and by each successive generation.”

“And you have some of it too,” Dan recalled.

“Yes, but not very much. I am a minor member of Governor Reslic’s family. I have enough of the Governor’s power to be able to serve as a missionary. That is why I could recognise it in Tim and Cindy.”

Dan nodded thoughtfully. “So since both Janelle and I had Tymorean ancestors, and therefore I assume traces of this power... then it must be some quirk of genetics that brought this on if that heritage is normally recessive.”

“Vincent considered that, that’s why he spoke to Ted Rogers and some of the students. As far as we know, the power should have stayed only as a potential. He was checking to see if someone here might have been a catalyst.”

“Are you saying there might be other students here that are part alien, I mean, part Tymorean?” Dan asked.

“Vincent only keeps records of the first generation of mixed liaisons, so I can’t answer that,” Tony admitted. “It has never been necessary before.”

“Fair enough, perhaps you can tell me why Vincent was in such a hurry to get them away?”

Howard sighed. “Their power is very, very strong. Once Vincent arrived, he was controlling it – keeping it at a very low level.” He decided not to mention the damping field in his office – that technology was unknown on Earth. “I think they were fighting that control and that is dangerous.”

Dan Ward finally moved to his chair and collapsed into it. “You are saying they would become worse than they have been...”

“Yes,” Howard said simply.

After a period of silence, Daniel spoke again. “You said that he needs to take them to your world...”

He paused and Howard waited for him to finish. “Will I ever see them again? Could I visit them? Might they return here as missionaries?”

Howard knew that Tymoreans usually never took aliens back to Tymorea, but maybe this was a time to make an exception – Dan’s children were exceptions.

“Speak to Vincent,” Howard suggested, relieved to be able to pass the responsibility onto one with higher rank. He hoped Dan didn’t ask how they were to get there. That was a technology way above anything available on Earth.

“What will happen when they get there?” Dan asked.

“I think, once they get to Tymorea, one of the Governor’s or someone in their immediate family will foster them.”

Dan echoed, “One of the Governors? Are they that important?”

Howard chose to shrug rather than refer to the prophecy that foretold of the day’s events.

Chapter 3 - Retrieval

As the van moved off, Vincent quickly settled a net of sensors over each of the children and turned on two monitors. The readings from the net came up on the screen as rows of light – showing breathing, pulse and heart rate as well as metabolic level and brainwaves. He studied the screens and felt stirrings of alarm. He hoped he hadn't waited too long to get them from the school. Fleeting, he wished that he hadn't needed to play down the seriousness of their condition for the father's sake, or to consider appearances. Taking them out on stretchers when eight hundred human children were outside, would have raised too much attention.

Moreover, Daniel had received too many shocks already, and had needed some counselling and reassurance too. After all, few truly sane Earth humans were ready to accept the existence of real space travelling aliens. No humans would be capable of comprehending the type of power the children were developing either. Daniel though, had begun to see the dangers of leaving his children uncontrolled and untrained and had already envisioned the results of them getting worse. Still, giving them up wasn't an easy decision and Vincent intended to petition the Tymorean Governors to let him bring Daniel to visit them, once they had started their training.

One of the monitors beeped and then the second one echoed it. As his eyes scanned the readings, he mentally urged his driver to hurry. Fortunately, his clinic was close, since he had to use the slow Earth means of transport. It was going to be a close thing. The children were on the verge of waking again. They had almost completely metabolised the sedative, and he had given them enough to keep a human adult out for two hours. Moreover, with the children's brain activity still at a frenzied level, he knew the power was controlling them. Neither of these signs boded well. If they should wake before he could get them to Tymorea... he might have trouble controlling them again.

John Goss, Vincent's driver and general assistant, backed the van up to the patient entrance at the rear of the clinic. This back area of the old house was screened from the neighbouring properties by a double row of trees. Once he had parked, he hopped out and opened the back doors of the van. He knew the routine, Vincent would have the monitors disconnected and would help him lift out the couches until the trolley support dropped down.

"Room 1," Vincent said tersely, and John nodded. That was his boss's private consulting room and where he often carried out unusual physiological tests. John didn't know what the tests were for but he was well trained in preparing the equipment. This trip though, had been an emergency call, so the equipment was all stowed in cupboards and only the desk, chairs and the two couches were in view when John pushed the first trolley inside.

"Move the girl onto the couch there please," Vincent directed as he lifted the boy to another one. Then he said, "John, advise my staff that I wish to remain undisturbed. I will be observing these children for a few hours and then deciding on treatment. I won't need you further today, and I might have to be away for a few days."

John mentally shrugged as he acknowledged. His boss was often away, travelling to patients in all parts of the country. He was, after all, a renowned psychologist. He did sometimes wonder what criteria were necessary for his boss to take on a patient – and in the current instance – what was wrong with the two kids.

Vincent wasted no time once he was alone. From an inconspicuous cupboard, he took out a compact box that sprang open at his touch. Inside was a simple looking device. At first glance, it might seem to be a hand held computer. The keypad, however, had strange glyphs and coloured squares instead of numbers and letters. Vincent pressed a complex series of keys and waited.

Nothing seemed to happen for a long moment, but Vincent was used to the time lag when sending a summoning signal to his brother on Tymorea.

“Vincent?” a voice came from the device’s speaker.

“Yes Xyron. I have two Earth children who are showing signs of Tymorean power.”

Vincent spoke in the direction of the device knowing it would pick up his voice from any where in that room. “I will transmit them to you if you would activate a long range beam to the coordinates of my laboratory.”

After a moment, the disembodied voice confirmed, “The beam is activated.”

Vincent replaced the communicator in the box and took from it two alloy devices that he clipped to his belt. He replaced the box back in the cupboard. While he waited for the beam terminus to appear, Vincent pressed a remote control device taken from a nearby table. The signal caused the laboratory doors to lock and the glass in the windows to darken. Moments later, an oval shaped mauve glow came into being in the centre of the room, just behind the two diagnostic couches.

Then when he had moved both couches into the mauve glow, he pressed a button on one of the alloy devices. It was his personal transmitter. A white vapour filled the room and when it had dispersed, the room was devoid of people.

A short time later, the doors automatically unlocked and the windows lightened.

A long distance away, on a completely different world, Vincent rematerialized, having travelled the distance at the speed of thought. He arrived with the two couches in a room practically identical to the one he had left on Earth. He recognized the subtle differences though and knew he had arrived on Tymorea. Vincent deactivated his personal transmitter. Immediately he began to feel heavier, as the natural gravity of Tymorea became re-established in the room. When the interplanetary “long range” beam was operating the gravity experienced was that of the planet where the beam was directed.

The walls of the room, originally opaque, became transparent and then non-existent. Vincent did not have to wait long for the arrival of his brother.

“Xyron,” Vincent greeted with a slight bow in respect of his brother’s rank of Governor. It looked like his brother had been disturbed in the middle of some official engagement for he wore his official robes - a gold cape over tunic and trousers of silver fabric.

The two men had strong familial likeness, high foreheads framed by dark hair, grey eyes and long straight noses. Xyron was the elder by five years.

Wasting no time, Xyron told his brother, “I have everything ready to begin testing immediately. Help me move the couches.”

They moved the sedated children to marked locations in the room and focussed the scanning devices.

“The sedative I gave them will be wearing off shortly,” Vincent warned his brother. He took off the light coloured jacket of his Earth style suit and folded it over a chair. “It was the strongest I had but it was being metabolized at a very rapid rate.”

“Could you not use your power to control them?” Xyron asked as he placed a hand on Tim Ward’s forehead. Then he answered his own question. “No, I sense why you could not!”

Before removing his hand, Xyron’s face took on a look of concentration and for a short time his hand glowed purple. He then placed his hand on the still sleeping Cindy and the same thing happened. The glow faded.

“I have controlled their power, and they will stay asleep until we are ready for them to wake,” Xyron told his brother.

Vincent let out a long sigh and relaxed.

“We have a great deal to do,” Xyron commented. “We must determine if these children are the ones mentioned in the prophecy of Dakven. Ty and Jono are waiting for our report!”

Xyron activated two scanning devices and programmed them to perform a full examination. While the device carried out its program, he removed the cape of his formal robes. He had been in the city of Dira, meeting with the Elders, when he received his brother's summons.

Each device scanned the patient a number of times, using different parameters for successive passes. Then it touched the patient once, but from that contact, Xyron obtained complete physiological information on his patients. Then for a time the brothers analysed the data. They looked at everything even the basic cell structure and genetic pattern. Only when they had considered every detail, did Xyron call a conference with the other Governors. It was irrelevant that it was then in the middle of the Tymorean night. Their findings were startling.

Before they left, Xyron activated an invisible wall of force to surround the sleeping children. The scanners would alert Xyron of any changes to their condition. He was taking no chances with the newcomers.

Chapter 4 - Confirmation

His Majesty, Pyani Tymoros, High King Governor stood at one of the windows of the dome shaped conference room. He was casually dressed in a loose fitting gold caftan that he had pulled on over the soft wool under shift and loose fitting trousers he had been wearing in his suite when his attendant delivered the word about the Earth children. His mind had not stopped pondering on the news, as it might be the fulfilment of an old prophecy. He had come to the conference room to wait for Xyron's evaluation, and for two hours, he had watched the gardens outside his palace as lightning flashed from cloud to cloud. The electrical storm had stalled over the estate, and it seemed more violent than usual, even for the Season of Storms.

The idea occurred to him that the behaviour of this storm was connected to the arrival of the alien children. However, all he knew so far was that the children's power had erupted and was extremely strong. In that much, they fulfilled Elder Dakven's prophecy. But human children? If they had been the offspring of Tymorean missionaries, there would have been warning signs before hand.

Tymoros turned when he heard the quiet sounds of servants bringing in refreshments and a light supper. They were placing them on the low table set apart from the main conference table.

He watched the storm for a moment longer, but with the darkness outside, the clear windows around the dome were turning opaque and light began to emanate from the panels in shades of blue and green. In the gardens below, the estate guards would be moving out to ensure that all servants and members of the three royal families were obeying the nightly curfew. In the great hall, three stories below, the evening meal would be being served.

Tymoros served himself from the trays of savoury finger food and was in the act of sitting down when he was joined by Jono Reslic, the Tymorean President Governor.

"Any problems?" Tymoros asked, seeing that Reslic was frowning slightly.

"No, just that young fool Zacary," was the reply. "Third time this week he has tried to stay out after curfew. I have extended his restriction to his room, but I will talk to him further in the morning."

Reslic had changed from his official clothes and was wearing black coveralls, which was his choice of clothing to relax in. He also served himself, and like Tymoros, settled into one of the chairs to wait.

Neither Governor felt the need for idle conversation; both contemplated the implications of the arrival of the Earth children. No decision could be made concerning them until Xyron reported.

Servants returned to clear the table, and to bring glasses of the wine favoured by each Governor. Tymoros took up his glass of sparkling white, while Reslic left his dark brown liqueur until the servants left the room. They would be assured of privacy, since the only way into and out of the room was by transmitting and only the senior servants were permitted to enter.

When another hour had passed, a faint humming alerted both men. They glanced towards a circular area of floor that was now glowing faintly.

Both Tymoros and Reslic watched intently as two columns of white vapour materialised into Xyron and Vincent.

Vincent followed his brother towards the other Governors. He gave them the traditional bow of greeting, and stayed standing when his brother sat down. In his hand was the data plaque summarising the results of their analyses of the Earth children. If directed, he would activate equipment that could project specific data onto one of the wall panels.

Before Xyron began to speak, Reslic moved his left sleeve to reveal a wrist communicator, and pressed one of the activators with his right hand. Vincent knew he had activated a force screen that would prevent anyone transmitting in during the discussion.

From his chair, Xyron began his report.

“It is as Elder Dakven prophesied. The two Earth children have a strong positive reaction to our power.” He paused, seeing both Reslic and Tymoros lean forward in their chairs. He gave a hand signal and Vincent knew it was his cue to give the background of the children.

“The children are fifteen year old twins – a boy and a girl. They were attending the educational institute where our missionary Tonos is in charge. The father of the children is his deputy, a man called Daniel Ward and who is the grandson of missionary Collen. His deceased wife was Janelle, daughter of missionary Maytani.”

“The onset of power was spontaneous?” Tymoros asked.

“No, in hindsight, the onset was evident over a period of several weeks. Tonos learnt from Daniel that their behaviour had changed, first becoming thoughtless and argumentative and then escalating to disrespect, disobedience, rebellion and finally violence.”

Vincent saw Reslic’s face tighten with concern, so he went on. “Tonos had allowed Daniel to deal with their earlier poor behaviour at school. It seemed that they had entered into a phase common to adolescent Earth children. He became involved when they assaulted a teacher. He noticed the signs of uncontrolled power when they came to his office. That was when he summoned me.”

“What was their attitude at that time?” Reslic asked. It was an important question.

“Tonos told me that they seemed to be in shock, had admitted to being extremely angry earlier, but could give no reason for the attack on the teacher. Both then seemed enervated. The girl mentioned nausea, eyes changing focus and buzzing in her ears.”

Tymoros nodded, recognizing some of the symptoms of transition sickness.

Vincent continued reporting. “When I arrived, they had managed to draw in energy from the ambient electrical system. The lights were unnaturally dim in Tonos’s office, despite the fact that Tonos had an energy damping field operating in there. The purple glow Tonos mentioned had spread from just their hands to encompass their forearms. I grounded out the power they had accumulated, but once out of Tonos’s office they quickly drew in more energy and given a chance, they would have run off. They resisted leaving the school.”

Xyron spoke then. “Vincent had to give them a substantial dose of sedative, and it barely gave him time to get them here. They were metabolising it extremely rapidly and their brain activity was dangerously high. I controlled their power before they had a chance to wake up, and I can only hope the effect will last long enough for us to give them some basic training.”

He did not have to explain the ramifications. The children were so powerful that Reslic would have to take on the task of training them.

Tymoros, considering the ‘why’ of the matter, asked, “With Tymorean forebears on paternal and maternal sides, could it have been a quirk of genetics that gave them the potential? Could any of our missionaries have unwittingly been a catalyst?”

“I considered that possibility,” Vincent admitted. “I spoke to the teacher they attacked and some of their closest friends at school. Neither the humans nor Tonos was a catalyst.”

Xyron returned to his report. “Since the children are unique in our history, I analysed their DNA. I found, as expected, a mixture of both Earth and Tymorean DNA. However, in these children the Tymorean genes are dominant, even though they are two generations removed from their nearest Tymorean relative.”

The rest of Xyron’s findings related to the excellent physiological condition of the children. This however was a common situation with part Tymorean children, when compared to fully alien children.

Vincent used a pause after the summary to add, “Their intelligence is very high. They were two of their schools brightest children.”

Tymoros did not find that surprising. Into the mediative silence, he asked, “Maytani is my father’s cousin. Is she still alive?”

“No, nor is Collen or Janelle. I had to tell Daniel of his origins. He accepted the truth of what I told him more readily than I expected. I think he might have learnt of us from Collen when he was growing up. He gave me his consent to bring his children here.”

“Daniel must be an exceptional man,” Tymoros murmured.

“I agree. He was a highly respected research scientist until his wife died. He became a teacher then, so he could care for his children. I would like to recruit him as an assistant.”

“That would be most appropriate,” Tymoros decided. “And I will foster his children, since Maytani is their closest Tymorean relative.”

Neither Xyron nor Reslic disputed that decision, but Reslic had concerns of his own. “How soon can we begin to teach them?”

“Perhaps a week,” Xyron considered. “I will set up a suite in the infirmary building where I can adjust the gravity. I will have it at Earth normal at first and gradually adjust it up. At the same time, I will administer nutritional supplements, provide regular physiotherapy and massage sessions as well as instigate sleep training in our language. Also, considering their behaviour prior to leaving Earth, I believe a memory block on their past would be appropriate.”

“That usually isn’t necessary,” Reslic remarked, tensing. “Do you have concerns about how they will respond to training?”

“No, since Vincent indicated that they were shocked by their actions. However, they were coming into second stage power without even the basic training our children usually have.”

Reslic’s fingers tapped the arm of his chair as he considered all he had heard. “You found no brain damage from the elevated power levels?”

“No, I believe we reduced them soon enough,” Xyron stated.

“Very well, I agree. Anger and fear in children with their potential will be an added complication. They will accept the training more readily with no preconceived ideas. You will maintain a check on the effectiveness of the power damping?”

Xyron nodded. He began to rise, intending to return to his laboratory.

Tymoros had a further point. “If these children inherited power unexpectedly, might there be others?”

“I will have all of our missionaries alerted,” Vincent promised.

Reslic stood abruptly saying, “I think we have all points covered. I will begin the procedure for granting them Tymorean citizenship.”

“They will need Royal patronage,” Tymoros added. “I will organise that.”

Reslic deactivated the security field and the group transmitted to their individual destinations.

“You didn’t mention all the details of the genetic scan,” Vincent commented to his brother in the privacy of the laboratory, as they moved the beds into position to transmit them to the intensive care infirmary.

“It wasn’t essential to the matter in hand. Tymoros was the logical one to foster the children, as Maytani was their closest relative. Let us see how they respond to their new environment and training. If the children prove to be intractable – it is better that Tymoros remains unaware of those results. As it was, I did not expect any near matches from the DNA analysis program. We only discovered the similarities because I had to identify...” Xyron stopped speaking for a moment and then changed what he was about to say. “Because I had Ty’s data filed. I will tell him if it becomes appropriate.”

Vincent did not comment on the change in Xyron’s sentence. Even after so many years, he recalled the unpleasant necessity of identifying the bodies of two Royal children, from amongst many commoners. The children had been Tymoros’s heirs.

“I will help you transfer them to the infirmary,” Vincent offered. “And watch them tonight.”

Chapter 5 - Integration

Vincent stood quietly and watched the two children. He had just injected the girl with a mild, short acting stimulant. The dose was not enough to bring her back to full alertness, just enough to study her reactions to her current surroundings.

Although Xyron’s monitoring instruments had indicated that his block on their power was effective, part of his mind was ready to react if she grew violent. This girl and her brother were not acting like Tymorean children who reached second stage. It was just possible that they might be able to overcome the block.

The drug took a few minutes to act, but Vincent saw the girl beginning to stir. The first thing she did was to push herself up, slowly, and try to look around. He was out of her cone of vision. She looked at the white featureless wall, the low mattress she sat on, and the blanket she had thrown off as she moved. Then she sat immobile for a few minutes, seemed to begin to fall sideways, but caught herself with her arm. Naturally, she would still be feeling sleepy.

“Tim?”

Vincent saw the girl notice the second mattress where her brother lay. She tried to stand, but could only manage to get to her knees. She began to crawl slowly towards her brother.

Although the gravity in that circular area of the lab was lower than Tymorean normal, it was higher than what they were used to on Earth.

Persistent, Vincent thought as he watched the girl reach her brother and once there spend minutes trying to shake him awake. She finally got a response.

“What?” the boy asked drowsily.

“Where are we?”

“Dunno. Go to sleep.”

Further shaking had no effect, so the girl looked around again, as if for a way out. She tried to stand again, actually made it to her feet, and then tried to turn around.

Vincent saw her start to topple over and moved quickly to catch her.

“Relax, Cindy,” he said quietly, as he eased her down onto her bed. She was asleep again already.

Vincent checked her pulse and breathing, did the same for her brother, and stood up.

The white wall around him became clear, revealing the instruments and screens that were part of the special monitoring laboratory.

Governor Xyron, in his role as the world’s senior scientist, joined his brother. “Satisfied?” he chided gently.

“For now,” Vincent hedged. “You didn’t see how fast they powered up back on Earth. They were able to draw power from the lighting system at their school.”

“I still have the power damping field on,” Xyron admitted, walking over to the boy’s bed. His foot activated a switch and the bed began to rise to waist height. “However, I was watching the brainwave monitor. The memory block is holding. There were no reactive surges and the brain activity stayed at resting level. She didn’t recognise her surroundings, but accepted them.”

Vincent raised the girl’s bed and copied his brother who was moving a hand held sensor along the boy, keeping it no more than an inch from the pale blue gown he wore. When he finished taking readings from the girl, he sent the results to his brother’s master unit.

“I think it is safe to reduce the level of sedation,” Xyron told Vincent. “I will maintain enough to allow them to accept the training and any inexplicable strange feelings. They will need help acclimatising to the gravity. Will you arrange for a group of children for that?”

“I have a few particular children in mind,” Vincent said with a quick grin. Then he became serious again. “Have the Elders foreseen anything more about these children?”

It was Xyron's turn to give a wry smile. "They have advised me, most earnestly, that they must be handled carefully." He shared the irony with Vincent. "However, I am not sure if they realise how powerful these children will be, would be now if we hadn't reversed the transition to second stage. I am aware, however, and I intend to minimise any risk of them resisting the training they need."

Vincent shuddered slightly. Thinking back to what these children had been like when Tonos first called him...he wanted to distract himself from the spectre of trying to control children who were both powerful and rebellious.

"When should they rouse enough to meet their royal cousins?"

Xyron checked the readings on his monitors. "The last dose of sedative should have worn off enough by midday. Have them taken outside once the other children are back at lessons. The fresh air should help them revive further. However, I don't expect them to be able to do much more than stand and walk around a little."

"I will speak to the attendants that His Majesty has appointed, and have a couple of the security guards with them while they are out there. Should I have the attendants come here to dress them?"

Xyron nodded and activated the controls to lower the beds again. Then he and Vincent vacated the circular observation area.

When they were clear, he reactivated the force wall that showed first as a pale mauve glow, and then became like a one-way window, opaque from the inside, clear from the laboratory.

Before leaving, Xyron added more advice, "They are going to need a high level of assistance until they are ready for structured learning. Make it clear to your select little group to act as if that were normal."

The glowing mauve terminus of a transmitter beam hung in the air under a huge old tree. Two hefty brown clad men, each carrying a docile teenager, emerged from the glow. Two more figures, in the green tunic and trousers of personal attendants, appeared next. These two carried rugs and cushions. The glow then disappeared.

One of the attendants, a mature aged woman, began to set out the rug on the ground in the shade. The other attendant, a young man, set the cushions into two piles. Only when they had finished, did the two other men set the children down onto the rug, so the cushions propped them up.

These two big men were part of the Royal Estate security force, and although they did not expect danger in this area of the garden, they stepped back and assumed an alert posture, and kept their eyes roving around the group. Their current duty was to ensure that these newcomers to the estate remained undisturbed by all but specifically authorised people.

The attendants crouched close to their charges and spoke softly to each other. As soon as the children began to stir, their attention went to anticipating their unspoken needs. Their charges were nowhere near as helpless as infants, but were in a state where they could not think for themselves.

Cindy felt the sun warmed breeze on her face as she stirred from sleep. She smelt the floral perfume of nearby flowers and the scent of damp soil. Her mind showed her the back yard of her father's house, and gave her the sense of being there.

Her eyes opened and scene of overhanging branches and sunlight filtering through leaves did not match her rapidly fading dream. She rolled onto her side and saw a bed of multi coloured flowers. Instinct, rather than intent, caused her nostrils to dilate and take in the ambient smells and they made her feel safe, and at home.

Movement in her peripheral vision drew her attention. She felt no surprise at seeing a grey clad figure being helped to sit up by someone in green. Instinctively, she recognised her twin, but felt no curiosity about the one who helped him. Nor did she react against the gentle hands that

were helping her to sit up, and to support her so she did not fall back down. Even when her view was blurred because the bright light made her eyes water, and some one used a soft cloth to dry them, she did not resist. This unasked for assistance was just a part of how things were.

When her eyes finally adjusted to the brightness, she turned to her twin and met his eyes. A fleeting recollection of her waking dream flashed through her mind. In feelings rather than thoughts, her mind dismissed the dream image. That was a made up vision. She belonged where she was and was content.

A glass was placed in her hand and she instinctively grasped it and put it to her lips. Yet her arm felt heavy, and it shook. A hand, poking from a green sleeve trimmed in gold, supported her arm and helped her to drink without spilling too much of the water.

Even though she just sat in the shade, Cindy felt the changes within herself. First, it was the sense of energy returning, or perhaps she was just now becoming fully alive. She began to notice more things, storing them in her mind, but not needing to think of them. Then she began to hear sounds – the buzzing of insects near the flowers, childish voices from some more distant place. When some of the voices seemed to be getting louder, she looked to see where they came from.

A tall, dark haired man led four children towards her.

Vincent noticed the blank expressions on the faces of Tim and Cindy Ward, and realised that they did not recognise him.

“I’m Vincent,” he introduced himself, when he was sure both children were looking at him. “I have brought some of your Royal cousins to meet you. They will help you to learn the way things are done here.”

He moved back and let the Royal children introduce themselves. As he expected, the oldest of the four assumed the leader’s role. He didn’t seem aware that the newcomers weren’t fully awake.

“I’m Gann Reslic; my father is the President Governor.” He turned to indicate the only girl in the group. “This is Lexina; she is High King Tymoros’s niece. Denlic here is Vincent’s nephew and Governor Xyron’s sixth son. The other lout here is my younger brother.”

Vincent gave Gann a look of reproof.

“His name is Stenn,” Gann added quickly.

Both newcomers looked from the solidly built blond haired speaker, to the slender reddish-blond haired girl, then to the sturdy dark haired boy and finally to the lithe blond boy who was grinning at them. There was an obvious resemblance between the speaker and this other blond boy – both had strong aquiline features, but apart from that and the hair, they were quite different. The speaker was serious and full of self-importance. The younger boy’s manner seemed to indicate he was full of mischief. As Vincent had guessed, Stenn Reslic approached the strangers first.

Stenn squatted down between the newcomers and offered his hand to the boy. He wasn’t fazed by the lack of response. He simply reached out and lifted the boy’s hand to give it a gentle grip of greeting. The boy turned to look at him, but gave no return tightening of grip. Perhaps he didn’t know how to greet people yet.

“Welcome home. Vincent said your name was Tymos,” Stenn said, meeting the boy’s eyes, and finding the blue-green colour quite surprising. He turned then to the girl and repeated his greeting, noticing that she made a move to bring her hand up to meet his. He took it gently and said, “We are really pleased you have come, Kryslie.”

She too had those startling blue-green eyes. “I’ve been told that you are not yet used to being here, and you came from somewhere with a lower gravity.”

Neither Cindy nor Tim reacted to his statement, and while Gann gave an impatient grunt, and Lexina moved closer to the girl, Stenn simply maintained his grin and gave a casual shrug.

He simply chatted as if these strangers were already his friends. “Apparently, the fastest way to get used to our gravity is to start walking around in it. No rush of course. While I am here to help you, I am being spared my uncle’s grumpy attention.”

Gann muttered a rebuke to Stenn, who ignored it, because he had managed to make the new boy smile, even though he made no move to try to get up.

Stenn considered the little that Vincent had said of these two. It wasn’t much, merely their names, and that they had come from off world, and still needed to acclimatise. Then he had requested that they asked the newcomers no questions. That had made him wonder, but he intended to obey that request because he wanted to be allowed to stay with them.

He turned his attention to the girl, without seeming to pay attention to the attendant holding her up. Lexina had knelt down nearby and taken the girl’s other hand. Seeing the two together seemed to emphasise the sense of frailty he had noticed when he had held the girl’s hand. Lexina wasn’t as big boned as Denlic’s sister Olassa, but by comparison to this new girl, she seemed to be.

“Come on, are you going to sit for the rest of your life?” Stenn teased, grinning again at the boy.

Still no sign of reaction. Was he mentally challenged? No, it had to be something else.

His mind put a name to Tymos’s attendant, and recalled he had gone into the service of the High King. The gold trim on his uniform supported that. Therefore, even though Tymos and Kryslie were wearing the basic grey coveralls, they were not servant rank. Well, wouldn’t be – he amended. They had to have Royal power, despite having brown hair like commoners. In addition, they had to be of high rank, or there wouldn’t be so much fuss over them.

Lexina was talking encouragingly to Kryslie, and had her attention, so Stenn turned back to Tymos. He could hear Gann muttering to Denlic, and caught, “I wonder which of His Majesty’s relatives fathered them.” Stenn recognised disapproval in Gann’s voice. Well his brother was a stickler for correctness. It shouldn’t matter. If Tymos and Kryslie were here, they were not commoners, and his brother had no place criticizing their elders.

“Come on, Tymos, up you get,” Stenn suggested again. He winked at Denlic and shrugged towards Lexina and Kryslie. “I want to see if you are taller than Gann here, or short like the smarter people.”

Tymos’s eyes flicked from Stenn to Gann and back. Stenn saw the start of understanding in them and awareness that Kryslie was on her feet and standing with Denlic and Lexina supporting her.

Gann came and put his hand under Tymos’s right shoulder, as the attendant helped to get him to his feet. Stenn took over from the attendant, without a word.

“Just take a few minutes to find your balance,” Gann directed pompously. “It’s important that you do, or you will keep falling and may hurt yourself.”

Stenn couldn’t smother a faint chuckle.

“We won’t let you fall,” he assured Tymos. “But we don’t intend to be walking sticks for the rest of your life.” Gann’s stifled retort told Stenn that his double meaning had not gone unnoticed.

It amused Stenn that Tymos chose to ignore the advice and try to take his first step, but he was full of concern when Tymos began to tremble with exertion after only a few steps. He knew that this was only to be expected, and part of him hoped the process of acclimatisation would take a while, but the rest of him was looking forward to having Tymos as a friend.

When the attendants indicated that their charges had had enough exercise for this first day, Gann, Denlic and Lexina said goodbyes, and gave promises of seeing them again the next day.

Stenn deliberately lingered, until the guards and attendants had taken the newcomers away. He was so full of thought that he jumped when Vincent spoke to him.

“I think you and Tymos will get on well together.”

“Ah! Yes, I hope so. I don’t think Gann was impressed though,” Stenn blurted.

“He need not help them if he prefers to study,” Vincent proposed. “They are not likely to be in his level.”

Stenn gave a sigh of relief. “How much longer will they be like that? When will they be able to have lessons with Lexina and Denlic and I?”

“If the three of you keep encouraging them and helping them with the exercises, they will adapt quickly. They won’t be ready for lessons with you for a while yet, but I expect they will be running around in about a week.”

“A week?” Stenn echoed. His mind did a mental back flip. He had assumed that Tymos and Kryslie were the children of missionaries related to Governor Tymoros. He’d met a few such children, and they had all taken a couple of months to acclimatise.

He heard Gann calling for him to come to his class, but he ignored him. Vincent gestured for Gann to go on.

“Tymos and Kryslie are going to need friends,” Vincent said quietly. “I hope you will keep encouraging them and talking to them. You seemed to take the right tack with them today.”

“I want to, Sir,” Stenn admitted. “Do I need to be careful with them? They seem so frail.”

“That should pass as they acclimatise. They are having nutrient supplements to enable them to develop stronger muscles,” Vincent explained. “My brother will have them lightly sedated for a while.”

“May I ask why they need that, Sir?” Stenn dared to ask. “I mean, their parents were Tymorean, right? A few of my cousins were born off world and they didn’t need sedation. And...why didn’t either of them speak? Didn’t they learn Tymorean?”

Stenn subsided, allowing Vincent time to consider his answer. He hoped he hadn’t been too inquisitive, but Vincent wasn’t as stuffy as some of his uncles.

After a moment, he had his answer. “They didn’t have the opportunity to learn our language – but we are giving them sleep lessons. The sedation is because those that reared them had no knowledge of us. When their power surfaced, they were...a problem.”

It only took Stenn a moment to figure out what Vincent meant. He summarised it with one word, “Ouch.”

Vincent smiled. “Yes, they must learn many basic things and quickly. I am sure, as your father’s son, that you understand why.”

Stenn nodded. “You’ve suppressed their memories then?” he guessed aloud.

Vincent nodded. “So you will understand that they are not imbeciles because they don’t know how to do things, or to act like we do. However, I personally, don’t think that has to mean all study and no play. Just don’t let them get into trouble.”

“I’m the right Reslic for the job, Sir,” Stenn promised, and he was happy to obey Vincent’s shooing off motion to go to his lessons.

For the past two weeks, High King Governor Tymoros had spent part of each evening observing the Earth children as they slept in the infirmary. Since they had been allowed to exercise in the gardens, he had cleared part of his busy schedule so that he could tune the monitors to follow their progress. In less than a week, they had adapted to the gravity, and were moving around as easily as the children who had been born on the estate. Equally noticeable was how Reslic’s young scamp, Stenn, was showing real maturity when he was with them.

Tymoros smiled, thinking of how Stenn made the newcomers laugh. He turned back to watch where Tymos and Kryslie slept. He was able to see them through a one-way window.

Even though he would be fostering them, he had not met them yet. For now, he had to be content with observing them from afar.

He resisted the urge to pace, even though he was alone. He had chosen to stay in the infirmary, watching the children, rather than attend that evening's Council meeting. He would normally have chaired it, but this evening the citizenship petition that Reslic had submitted for the children was on the agenda. As the person nominated to sponsor them, he had no vote.

It should be a formality. The Governor's council, which consisted of Elders and senior members of the three ruling families, would listen to the petition presented by Governor Reslic on the behalf of the children, discuss it and make their decision. When the formalities were completed, then he would meet the children he was to foster.

Tymoros did not admit to his inner impatience and yearning.

At first, the children had been curiosities - aliens with Tymorean power. He had wondered how they would react to being on Tymorea. Now, watching them was more than a compulsion. It was like a nagging ache when he was unable to do so. He remembered his own children. He had sired five and they had all died. Fostering these could never replace what he had lost but there was something in the way the children moved and smiled that evoked sad memories.

The only issue that might be a problem would be to convince the Council that the children would respond to training. They would want to be sure that when Xyron loosed his control of their power that they would not be rogue - people in whom the Royal power was warped and dangerous.

That idea caused Tymoros to consider all that Vincent had said of the children. The onset of power was recent. Surely not long enough to warp their minds and make them dangerous.

Having come to anticipate being their guardian, he did not want to have to neutralise their power if they were untrainable. An unpleasant duty of his role as Governor was disempowering people that became rogue; fortunately, it was a rare occurrence.

He turned his mind from that possibility and concentrated on positive thoughts. He held onto one in particular; a prophecy told to him seventeen years ago, when he was still reeling from the death of his two remaining children. It had assured him that one day he would have heirs. It was all that had made it possible for him to retain some hope six years later when his next child had died as an infant.

"Ty?"

Tymoros spun round and saw Xyron had entered the observation room.

"Have they voted?" he asked unable to keep his tone neutral. Xyron did not miss his eagerness.

"The Council have approved citizenship and agreed that you are the only possible sponsor for them. They have requested clarification on the point of the highest rank that the children will be entitled to and have agreed that the title of Prince and Princess is appropriate based on the level of potential. They do however request your approval of that point before making it legal."

"I did not believe that matters of title and rank were to enter into the petition!" Tymoros remarked thoughtfully, becoming suddenly still. "What have you told them that you haven't told me, Xyron? I understood that as they were not actually heirs that I engendered, the titles you mentioned were inappropriate!"

"The council members raised the matter because of the extremely high potential of these children and your current lack of Heir Designates." Xyron reported.

"Are you saying that they would not object to my naming these non-Tymoreans my heirs?"

Tymoros stated in some surprise. "Why?"

"Come over to the computer and I will show you!" Xyron invited, heading for the terminal in the observation room.

He accessed the data file on the Earth children and quickly recapped the data that he had obtained from the initial physiological sample.

“I ran a DNA scan. Vincent had obtained a sample from the children’s father, and I naturally compared that with those of the children.”

Xyron brought up three graphs on a screen. Tymoros knew enough to compare them.

“Each has 50% similarities to their father as normal. Where is this leading?” Tymoros asked pointedly.

Xyron brought up a fourth graph, labelled only with a code number, then a fifth and sixth.

“The point is this; I ran a comparison search through my data banks. I do not have samples from every one on the estate, but I do have an extensive collection. I found the fourth one. You will note that there is an 80-82% degree of similarity between the DNA of each Earth child and that sample.”

“Whose sample is the fourth sample?” Tymoros asked with a flash of interest.

“Yours, Ty!” Xyron admitted, watching the surge of emotion on the High King’s face.

“Who are the last two examples from?” These had many similarities his own sample but not as many as did the alien children.

Xyron gave the names of two of Tymoros’s dead children.

Tymoros studied the data, his mind exploring the implications of Xyron’s findings.

Two new graphs were added to the screen and Xyron spoke again, “These are new samples taken from the Earth children today. They now show a 94% similarity to yours.”

Tymoros felt a tremor of premonition.

“Tell the Council, as a matter of courtesy only, that I will approve the proposed titles and that the rank of these children will be at least that of those that I personally engender.” Tymoros spoke carefully. “However, the citizenship papers shall only state that their petition was approved and that I was the appointed sponsor. Any decision regarding their position in my house is mine alone to make.”

Xyron returned to deliver Tymoros’s response to the council, pleased and gladdened by the positive signs Tymoros had betrayed. In his mind, there was no doubt that at the public ceremony to present the children as members of his family, Tymoros would announce them to be his Heir Designates. He had stopped short of stating that this evening, as he had yet to meet the children. He would want to make his own decision based on his own interaction with them. That was only right.

Chapter 6 - Acceptance

“Silence,” Cindy thought. “Why haven’t I noticed it before?”

She looked around, really seeing the room for the first time and realised she was sitting on a bed. Was this a hospital room? Why was she there?

She saw her twin. A dark haired, strongly built man, dressed in silver and gold, was helping him sit up. She felt a momentary twinge of panic until she recalled that there had always been a dark haired man around them when they woke.

Tim was wearing a gold and purple outfit of an unfamiliar design. She looked down at her own clothes.

“I’m wearing an outfit like that too, only it’s red and gold. What was I wearing before?” Cindy wondered, easing herself off the bed and going to her brother. She was worried because her mind was producing questions she could not answer. Her brother seemed to be in a trance like state and the dark haired man was touching his forehead with a purple glowing hand.

Tim’s eyes seemed to focus at last, he recognised her, but he still seemed disorientated. Cindy went to sit beside him.

“Children, I am Professor Governor Xyron. My fellow Governors and I are responsible for your presence on Tymorea.”

His gaze rested on both children who were listening intently.

“You are from Earth, but even so you have inherited a gift that is unique to Tymoreans of Royal Blood. Here and here alone, you will learn to utilize your power properly. On Earth, untrained, it would have destroyed you.”

Xyron paused to gauge the effect of his words on the children. They appeared to accept them without question.

He continued. “I have ensured that your memories of your past life will be dormant during the period of your training. It will help you to accept the necessary teaching without needing to break pre-existing thought patterns and habits. I have tested each of you since your arrival and I have measured your potential. You will join the household of Tymoros the High King and have the title Prince and Princess because of the level of power you have inherited. The High King will be your Guardian and Foster Father.”

“I do not fully understand,” Cindy spoke the Tymorean dialect in a clear well modulated voice. “I can accept my presence here, but how can I be a Princess and daughter to the High King when I was born on Earth?”

“The Elders, those who have great wisdom, know that is your true place. You have much to learn and you are still young and familiar only with the reasoning process of the humans on Earth. In time, you will come to reason like the wise ones of this world.” Xyron’s voice was soft and cultured, characteristic of those of Royal Blood. “It is time for you to forget you are Cynthia, like you have forgotten your previous life. You are Krysle, daughter of Pyani Tymoros the High King.”

“And I?” Tim spoke for the first time. “I am...?”

“Tymos, son of Pyani Tymoros the High King,” Xyron told him with a smile. “And your Foster Father is eager to meet you.”

Xyron led his charges through a seeming maze of corridors. He an arm across each of their shoulders, and felt them keeping close to him, half under the gold fabric of his cape. He was aware of the two heads turning from side to side, looking at everything. When they emerged into the huge open entrance hall of his palace, he felt them stop and stare.

The entrance chamber was impressive with its high ceilings, hanging chandeliers, and the glittering tiled floor. Portraits and trailing plants alternated around the walls, interspersed with tall mirrors that served to make the area seem even larger.

After a moment, Xyron urged his charges onward, until they stopped in the centre of a circular tiled mosaic. The children looked down and tried to make sense of the pictures. They didn't seem to hear him say that they needed to transmit to the Conference Room.

Xyron smiled to himself as he turned to speak to his attendant. "Jerik, activate the transmitter." He noticed the attendants assigned to the children following closely.

Both children gave a start of surprise when a new room appeared around them after the tingling and brightness of the transmission process. He was pleased to note that they did not seem disorientated and were already taking in their new surroundings. However, he didn't give them time to study the huge oval conference table with its ring of empty chairs. He turned them to face a small alcove with four chairs and a low table, where a tall red headed man was rising from one of the chairs.

Both Tymos and Kryslie noticed him and then glanced back. Xyron nudged them forward to meet Tymoros who was also dressed in his silver and gold Robes of State. His was a tailored suit of gold cloth with a silver lined gold cloak.

Tymoros was alone. His personal attendant, like those accompanying Xyron, had retreated from the Conference Room to give the group privacy.

As soon as Xyron materialised on the beam in pad, his impatience to meet the children reached a peak. He rose and studied them close up, for the first time. Except for their brown hair, they were very like two of his dead children. He noticed the nervousness that kept them close to Xyron.

"Tymos, Kryslie," he welcomed them in his soft voice. He smiled at them both. "I have waited a very long time to meet you!"

Both children were now looking at him, studying him. He moved towards them and saw a look of wonder on their faces.

"Father?" both spoke in unison, breaking out of Xyron's grip and moving forward towards him.

A joy he had never expected to feel again, overwhelmed Tymoros as the children spontaneously hugged him. He returned the embrace and something deep within him roused into fierce protectiveness. He held the children tightly. The three heads were almost touching.

"Xyron, they are mine!" Tymoros said, his voice unsteady. His eyes were moist as he looked at his fellow Governor, who was smiling with intense satisfaction.

"As I told you, Ty, they are genetically closer to you than to those who begat them and closer than your own children once were."

Even as Tymoros kept his foster-children close to him, he stopped thinking of them as strangers. They were his children in every way that mattered.

Tymoros announced, "Summon Jono; I want the ceremony to begin at once. These children are too precious to risk. We must provide all possible protection for them."

Jono Reslic President Governor was ready for the summons. Moments later, he materialized beside his fellow Governors. He too was dressed in the gold ceremonial robes. Like Tymoros, he was a tall man, though his hair was blond and he was physically powerful. He had the aura of controlled power common to each of the Triumvirate Governors. Slung in a magnificently decorated scabbard at his side was a jewelled sword. It was the Sword of Judgement, the symbol of his office since the beginning of Tymorean history.

"Are they ready, Cousin?" Jono asked the High King.

"Yes, Jono, they are ready," Tymoros answered for them. "They are ready to renounce their origins and become citizens of Tymorea." The children nodded shyly in agreement.

“Come forward!” Jono Reslic commanded. Tymos and Kryslie began to move forward hesitantly. A sharp command, this time from Xyron, made them snap to attention in front of the President.

“Kneel!” Reslic commanded, studying the children. He saw the fleeting glance they shared with each other as they obeyed, slightly wide-eyed. He saw them both swallow convulsively as he drew the Sword of Judgement and hold it point down in front of him. Then their eyes stared at the jewelled hilt.

“This is a most solemn occasion,” Reslic continued. “Do you, children of Earth, pledge to obey the laws and lawful rulers of Tymorea?”

“We so pledge!” Tymos and Kryslie answered together. After they had spoken, Tymoros and Xyron gently pushed them forward until they were lying face down on the carpeted floor.

Reslic continued, “I, as President of the Planet Tymorea, hereby renounce for you your alien origins and grant you entry into the citizenship of Tymorea.”

With the ceremonial sword, he touched each shoulder of each of Tymorea’s newest citizens.

“Arise!” he commanded. The two new citizens stood up awkwardly but quickly came to attention. Reslic sheathed the Sword and noted the slight relaxation in their formal stance. He too, relaxed slightly. These two children could not know that they had just passed an important test. The magnificent Sword was not merely an ornament, but a conduit to the Guardians of Peace. As he had touched it to each of them, he had felt the sword hum. It was an unusual sensation, but not a warning.

He took his eyes from the children and found that Tymoros had approached with two gold rings resting on a small silver cushion. He continued the ceremony, taking one of the rings and directing Tymos, “Allow me to have your right hand.”

Although Tym had no idea of the reason, he obeyed promptly.

“Tymos with this ring you are sealed into the citizenship of Tymorea and none may question this privilege.”

Unprompted, Tymos bowed after the ring was on his finger.

Reslic repeated the action with Kryslie, who bowed, glanced up at him, and then felt the ring with her other hand. She stared at it until distracted by the arrival of a group of green clad attendants and a white haired man dressed in a long brown robe, belted at the waist.

Tymoros stepped between his children as Reslic stepped back. “The granting of citizenship is a private affair,” he explained quietly. However, there are now, some formal documents to be signed. I am aware that neither of you are able to read the Tymorean written language yet, so I will have Aldiv read them to you. Ask questions about any point that you don’t understand.”

Aldiv, a tall middle-aged man with reddish blond hair, bowed to Tymoros and took a document from the low table. He walked to stand in front of his master, glanced at both children to be sure he had their attention, and began to read. He took extra care to make his words distinct and clear. His eyes flicked from the document to the faces of the children, making his own assessment of them.

His master had called them his children, though in the ten years that he had served His Majesty, he had heard nothing about them. It wasn’t his place to contest that claim, even though the children had brown hair like the commoners did. Perhaps they had been fostered elsewhere, for safety, until now.

He reached the clause about, “Obedience to the Supreme Rulers of Tymorea,” and saw the eyes of the children flick to Xyron and Reslic and then they turned their head fractionally to see Tymoros. There was intelligence there, but no obvious resentment. Aldiv took that as a good sign.

He had met some teenaged children, whose missionary parents had sent them back home when they had reached this age. A few of those had been full of resentment at the idea of total obedience to three strangers.

When he finished reading, he placed the citizenship document on the low table, next to where Jerik had placed two pens and two hand-written name cards. Jerik handed a pen to each of the children and indicated where to sign, explaining that the cards had the written form of their names.

Aldiv noticed the quick glance the children gave each other before taking the pens into an odd but workable grip. He moved closer, to watch unobtrusively as they began to write, first flicking their eyes from card to paper and then writing as they looked at the card. The signatures wavered off the faint line, but were, otherwise, excellent copies of letters that must have been unfamiliar. Good hand eye coordination these young ones had.

The children put their pens down and glanced to where Tymoros was signing another document. They watched as the other Governors witnessed his signature.

“Aldiv,” Tymoros summoned.

“Sire,” Aldiv acknowledged with a slight bow, after he had crossed to the large conference table.

“Take this document to the official archive, and the citizenship papers to the census archive,” Tymoros directed, before walking back to where his children were.

Jerik passed the two signed documents to Aldiv, who placed them under the first, which still had damp ink. The High King’s attendant glanced at the top document and felt a sense of elation as he took in its gist. His Majesty had formally recognised the two children as his own and granted them the privileges of being Heir Designates to his position as High King Governor. He wasn’t about to question why the girl was also an Heir Designate.

Then Aldiv considered the reaction of the commoners and the lesser Royals who would be attending the imminent festivities, and how they would react when they heard His Majesty’s announcement. Every one in the three palaces knew that Tymoros had taken on the fostering of the newcomers, who were to be presented that evening, but that was all.

Aldiv continued to read the document as he blew on the ink to dry it. Once he delivered the documents, he had many things to oversee before the ceremonies. He glanced over to where his master stood talking to the children, and waited to see if he was needed for anything else. His instinct was correct; Tymoros flicked a glance at him, long enough to signal for his approach.

As he arrived, he heard Tymoros say to the children, “Sit here for now. The formalities are over, so you can relax until the public ceremonies begin. I need to attend to some final details, but I will send for you in time for you to get ready.”

“Public ceremonies?” the girl echoed. Kryslie, Aldiv reminded himself. She looked a little fearful as she sat down on the front edge of one of the chairs. Tymoros though, smiled with pleasure.

“It is traditional for our children to be formally recognized at about your age with a “Coming Out” celebration. We have been preparing for yours for several weeks. The people who live on the estate will be joined by invited commoners and those Elders from the cities that wish to attend.”

“Oh,” Kryslie acknowledged blankly.

“Sounds like a party,” the boy...Tymos...commented.

“Wait here, for now,” Tymoros repeated, before walking over to the beam in pad.

Aldiv moved quickly to join him, aware that President Governor Reslic had just departed, and Governor Xyron was moving to sit with the children.

Xyron sat opposite Tymos and Kryslie. He noticed that the twins were perched nervously on the front of chairs. He sat back in a chair and deliberately chose a relaxed posture. He noticed the children relax as well. But then, with the other Governors out of the room, the aura of power

was less overpowering. These children were very sensitive to that aura, and this was the first time they had been in the presence of all three Governors at once.

He decided to add more detail to answer Kryslie's implied question. "Your Coming Out today will be more than just the presentation of another Royal child."

He saw he had the undivided attention of his two listeners. "Tymoros, your father, will also be introducing you as his Heir Designates. After tonight, no one will be in any doubt about your position here. They will know that you rank at the second level, and be equal in rank to my eldest children and those of Jono Reslic."

Seeing blank looks on the faces of Tymos and Kryslie, he knew they did not comprehend his words. "The only people who rank higher are myself, your father and Jono."

A flicker of understanding appeared in both sets of blue-green eyes. Xyron added an explanation and a warning.

"At this time, and in spite of your rank, you have no power or authority over anyone else. At the same time, only those of Governor rank or those we appoint, have authority over you. That includes your attendants at the moment, since they know what is expected of you, and they will guide you until you settle into the usual routine."

After a glance at his sister, Tymos began to speak, stopped, considered something and then began again.

Xyron expected him to question the idea of a routine, but he didn't.

"I have noticed, Sir, that others bow when greeting you or the other Governors. You have not commented on our appalling bad manners."

"Such a greeting is customary," Xyron agreed. "But we are aware that you are not familiar with our ways yet. We have not expected it of you. We will give you instruction in Court Etiquette along with other subjects. Do not be concerned. During the formal proceedings soon to start, your attendants will ensure that you know what is expected of you."

"And what will be happening?" Kryslie asked.

"The 'Coming Out' celebration is an occasion for us to invite important commoners to join with us to welcome our children into adulthood and for our children to meet those they will one day come to serve."

Servants appeared bringing a plate of finger foods, and a carafe of fruit juice. They moved the small table near the children and placed the refreshments there.

Once again, Tymos and Kryslie exchanged glances. Both wondered what they had been eating and drinking before this.

Xyron went on explaining, "You will need to change into the formal robes. These will be waiting in the apartments assigned to you in Tymoros's palace. And your attendants will need to make your appearance acceptable." Xyron spoke casually.

"Will Stenn and the others be at the celebration?" Kryslie asked.

Xyron smiled. "Of course. When they have finished their day's study."

Tymos's query of, "Study?" went unanswered when a man and a woman, clad in green uniforms materialised and then turned and bowed to Xyron.

"Off you go," Xyron invited. "You don't want to be late for the party."

The woman moved to face Kryslie and bowed. "I am Delia," she introduced. "I have been assigned to assist you."

Kryslie rose, showing no sign of recognition of the woman who had been tending her since soon after her arrival on Tymorea. "Um, thank you." She glanced back at her brother as Delia took her arm.

The male servant was bowing to Tymos and simply said, "I'm Morov." He put out a hand to help Tymos to his feet. "You will need to stand close to me so I can take you to your apartment."

Once again, Tymos and Kryslie experienced the odd sensation of transmitting and this time arrived in rooms that were less elaborate.

Delia observed her mistress after they had rematerialised and saw her jerk around as if looking for something.

“Your brother has gone to his own apartment. It is in another wing of the palace,” Delia said quickly, to reassure her charge. The look of fright eased from her face.

“Oh,” Kryslie said.

“Will you like me to show you the use of the sonic shower?” Delia asked to distract her further. She had noticed the frequent glances Kryslie shared with her brother, as if they were two parts of one mind.

“Uh...yes, I guess,” Kryslie agreed. She was seeing the comfortable sitting room around her, and looking at it as if she didn’t know what to do.

In fact, she knew the chairs were for sitting in and basic things like that, but she was realising that she had no memory of anywhere but the sparse sleeping room with the two beds and white walls.

“Is this for me?” Kryslie asked. “All this is almost as grand as the Conference room. Does everyone have chairs like this?”

Daringly, she sat in one of them. The satin fabric covered wickedly comfortable cushions, and the carved wooden armrests fit her arms perfectly. She ran her hand over the pale green fabric and her smile was one of delight.

Delia merely smiled at her pleasure, gratified that Kryslie liked the décor she had chosen for her mistress.

“The bathing suite is through here, my lady,” she reminded her charge.

Kryslie took the hint and followed her attendant. The floor of the bathing room had pale green hexagonal tiles, and the walls had tiles forming a pleasing geometric design, in blending shades of green, fawn and lemon. Delia watched as Kryslie looked around, ready to assist if needed, but after a moment, some vestige of memory surfaced and Kryslie took herself to use the privacy cubicle.

Delia set about adjusting the sonic shower, selecting fragrances and the temperature of the ambient air. Without a fuss, when Kryslie looked blankly at the device, she assisted her mistress to use it.

Once clean, Delia draped Kryslie in a long fluffy gown and had her sitting in front of a mirror and began brushing and combing her hair.

“Your hair really needs attention. Do you prefer it long or short?” Delia asked.

“I don’t know. Can you do something acceptable with it?” Kryslie asked.

“I’ll neaten the length, and braid it,” Delia decided, and she began at once.

When that was done, she applied subtle make up and took Kryslie through to her sleeping room where her formal robes were waiting.

Kryslie stopped inside the room and simply stared. It was huge, larger than the entry room, with a bed in one corner, surrounded by filmy curtains, several chairs, a desk with a computer terminal, and a large floor rug that looked and felt like fur.

Delia took a few minutes to show her the subtly hidden cupboards full of clothing, and another concealing a small food heater and cool storage module, and others that were still empty. Kryslie’s eyes lit up with every new revelation.

Delia gave her little time to consider it all. “You need to get dressed, my lady. Your father wishes to see you before the ceremony starts.”

Delia observed that Kryslie still accepted being dressed like a doll though she was cooperating more now and that made the process easier.

“Do all Royal children wear these for their coming out?” Kryslie asked. “This fabric is like what the Governors were wearing.”

“No, but you and your brother are His Majesty’s eldest children.” Delia didn’t elaborate, but went on fitting the silver-lined gold cape to the shoulders of the long sleeved silver tunic. The tunic clung to Kryslie’s shape and fell down to knee level, over the gold trousers. The cape flowed into a short train.

“There – all done,” Delia said with satisfaction. She hid her thought of, “Now you look like a Royal Princess, not the heathen that arrived three weeks ago.”

Instead, she said, “I will get you a drink while you wait.”

On arrival in his apartment, Tymos glanced around the room.

“This is more like a room should look. Where are we?” Tymos asked. “I thought that white walled place was for us.”

“That was the infirmary,” Morov said dismissively. “This is your apartment, Prince Tymos. The bathroom is through to the left and the bedroom is through the other door. You will need to get washed and dressed. His Majesty will be expecting to talk to you before the ceremony.”

“That’s fine,” Tymos agreed, with out making a move to do anything.

Morov nudged Tymos towards the bathroom. He noted that his charge had more alertness than he had shown in earlier days, but still seemed to need someone to think for him. That state should not last much longer, but for now, Morov was not embarrassed to do all the little personal things necessary to prepare Prince Tymos for this important first presentation.

The most essential thing was to make his highness into someone who no longer resembled the shaggy haired ponies of the mountains. As a courtesy, he first advised a haircut, and when Tymos simply agreed, he set to trimming it so it was short, neat and even at the sides and back and longer, but slicked back on the top.

When the summons to the High King came, Tymos too, was dressed in a silver and gold outfit.

Tymoros greeted Tymos and Kryslie when they arrived in his suite with their attendants, and complimented their new appearance. He noted that they accepted his praise, without reaction, but then, Xyron still had them sedated, and so would accept all that was new and strange in the same calm manner.

“Tymos, Kryslie, there is someone I want you to meet,” Tymoros invited. They looked at him expectantly, but turned when they became aware of a woman approaching.

She was blonde and petite, with her hair braided with lilac ribbon into an elaborate style. Her dress colour matched the ribbon, and the silk fabric flowed from her shoulders, and was held in at the waist by a chain of copper discs, each an inch wide. She moved gracefully over to nestle next to Tymoros.

“This is Tanya, my consort, and your foster mother,” Tymoros introduced.

Tanya beamed a genuine smile of delight. “I have heard of you, Tymos, Kryslie. I am so pleased to meet you at last. And glad you have recovered from your journey here.”

Her smile didn’t falter when neither child reacted. Instead, she moved closer to them and reached a hand out to each of them. “You poor things. Of course, this is all strange to you.”

Kryslie looked down at her hands and said, “We don’t...” but stopped, not knowing how to articulate the strangeness she felt.

Tanya seemed to understand. “You will soon get used to being here, and soon get to know us. You belong here.”

“Why don’t we remember anything,” Tymos blurted, suddenly agitated.

Tanya moved forward and drew Tymos into a hug. “It is so you will have a new start,” she said with a glance at her consort. “You will soon learn your place here, and I will always be available to help you.”

Kryslie leant over and let herself be drawn into the hug too. Tanya sent a message with her eyes to Tymoros and he made the embrace four fold.

They drew apart when Tymos had become calm. Tymoros said nothing to explain the reason why they remembered nothing. It was not the time for that, so to distract them he said. "I have a gift to welcome each of you to my family – to welcome you home."

From his pocket, he drew out two silver boxes, and placed them on the low table near the chairs. Kryslie looked at the boxes with a show of interest, but said nothing, mutely glancing from the box to her new foster father.

Tymoros opened the first box and drew out a pendant on a gold chain. He showed it to Kryslie, and her eyes went to it as the light from the chandelier above glinted off the gold setting and sent reflections of red and blue from the gem.

"The stone is a ruby-amethyst," Tymoros explained.

Kryslie reached out a hand, and Tymoros let her take it and touch the shield-shaped gold setting, and rotate the oval shaped gem on its hidden axis. Tanya helped her unclasp the chain and put it around her neck.

Kryslie looked up at her new foster father and said very softly, "Thank you."

The pendant Tymoros took from the second velvet lined box was similar but different. The gold setting for this one was sword shaped and the gem was a long slender sliver of the red mineral. The gem was also set so it spun on an axis down the length of the blade.

Tymos too, was entranced by the gift, and let Tanya help him to wear it. "Thank you father," he said sincerely.

They both sat quietly then, not knowing what they should do or say while waiting. Tymoros did not try to make them talk, for he knew they were like fragile empty vessels, waiting to be filled with knowledge and only just becoming aware of themselves.

Had they been younger, this presentation could have been delayed until they had fully acclimatised. They could have begun their training and be able to handle themselves with other Tymoreans and be less vulnerable.

Perhaps it would have been better to wait, but the Elders had seen the need to reassure the people of the world of the continuation of his bloodline.

He sat in a chair across from them and studied them, seeing their features superimposed over a memory of others. He must not let those memories affect him, except to remind him to watch over these children and keep them safe and protected.

Tanya had moved away, but she returned with a servant bearing a tray of drinks. She placed one next to each child, and handed a third to Tymoros.

"It is a restorative," she said in explanation. "You will need all your strength for the ceremonies."

She watched her new foster children take their glass and sip slowly. After taking half of the drink, she saw some colour come back into their faces and their posture relax.

Tymoros noted it too, and said softly, "You know that no one here wishes you ill, and everyone is glad you are finally here - I most of all."

He didn't get any verbal answer, just faint nods.

At that moment, Aldiv, Tymoros's personal attendant, materialised near the door to the suite and approached the group discreetly. "All is ready, your Majesty. Do you wish me to transmit you down to the balcony antechamber?"

"Yes, I think that will be best. Let the children finish their drinks and we will go."

Aldiv nodded, and flicked a glance at the still pale children each clinging to their glass. His look was of concern; they still looked...lost.

The antechamber was on the second floor of the Palace, and it overlooked the Royal Gardens. A red velvet carpet led out through a door to a balcony visible to the guests waiting in the gardens. Delia and Morov waited near the door.

Tymoros told his foster children to wait with their attendants and he retreated from the room and went along a passage.

A musical fanfare sounded from outside the room. The attendants were waiting for this signal. Delia opened the door leading to the balcony. Morov spoke quietly to them. "The Governors will be waiting on the balcony. Tymos, you go first, and your sister will follow. You will bow to each Governor and then stand to one side and await their instructions."

Tymos nodded, he was nervous and he knew that Kryslie, half a step behind him, felt the same way. The green clad attendants stayed back beyond the golden train.

As they stepped outside the sun glinted off their clothes and their jewels as well as showing glints of red in their brown hair. The crowd applauded loudly. The people felt privileged to witness the first public appearance of the Prince and Princess. The emotion made Kryslie and Tymos feel giddy. Tymos paused, let his sister catch up and he took her hand in his, but they continued along the balcony by concentrating their attention on the figures on the dais at the end.

The walk seemed endless, but eventually they reached the Governors and bowed in perfect unison. Then, while keeping their eyes off the crowds below, they went and stood to one side.

It was with relief that they saw Tymoros move behind them and felt his arm around them. He must have felt them trembling, for he said softly. "The eyes won't hurt you."

Then he hugged them closer to him and the intensity of the attention seemed to diminish.

Tymoros introduced Tymos first and then Kryslie before beginning a formal speech. He was pleased to note that his children remained standing straight when he released them and maintained a dignified silence even when the cheering erupted at the end of his speech.

He was aware, from years of public scrutiny and public speaking, that the attention of every one in the crowd below was on his children. He had no doubt that a great many of the people wondered why there had been no mention of these children before now. Perhaps if they thought about the odd deaths of his other children they might think it was deliberate. He hoped that seeing him hug them both would convince them that the children weren't strangers.

He hoped too, that now this crowd of commoners had seen Tymos and Kryslie, the farcical rumours that he would be the last High King, would die out. He stilled those ruminations as Aldiv approached with two crystal, gold and ruby coronets on a cushion.

The crowd hushed as the climax of the ceremony neared. The coronets were symbolic, worn only by the Heir Designates to the position of High King Governor.

Neither Tymos nor Kryslie moved as he placed a coronet on their heads. It was as well that the crowd couldn't see how white faced his children were. He really needed to finish this ceremony as quickly as tradition allowed.

When the crowd erupted into cheering again, he waved down at them, smiled for a few moments, and then swept Tymos and Kryslie in front of him and back to the antechamber. He knew that Jono and Xyron followed behind him.

Once out of public gaze, Xyron came over and spoke quietly, "Ty, I don't think they are ready for the crowds below."

"The guests expect them," Tymoros mused, keeping an arm around each of his foster children. "But I agree. It would be too much. Perhaps the carriage could be used."

"Indeed. I will have it arranged." Xyron promised.

Jono Reslic watched from near the balcony door, "I will have the palace guards positioned around the route. I do not expect trouble from the young commoners but I wish to be sure."

Tymoros moved to two chairs and said, "Sit down for a while, Tymos, Kryslie."

He saw they were both ready to agree, and their attendants went to stand near them.

When Reslic indicated that the palace guards were in place, and Xyron confirmed that the carriage was waiting, Tymoros led the way through to a rear entrance of the palace. A carriage was waiting and he helped his children into it. It was an open sided carriage, capable of seating six. He chose to have Tymos and Kryslie on either side of him. They seemed more relaxed now, since no guests were allowed on this side of the palace.

"I would spare you this if I could," Tymoros apologised, as the driver urged the graceful beast hitched to the carriage into a slow walk. "It is traditional, and necessary for the commoners to really see you. I want there to be no doubts about the fact that you are truly my heirs."

He felt some of the tenseness return.

"At least this way, you don't have to shake countless hands, and murmur polite courtesies..."

Kryslie shuddered. "I wouldn't know what to say."

"I am not expecting it of you," Tymoros assured her. "This time it will be enough to wave and smile as we move through the crowd. The palace guards will keep the people back. When we finish I will take you somewhere quiet."

"Please," Tymos said with emphasis as they reached the edge of the crowd.

Tymoros noticed that in spite of their reluctance to face the crowd, they obeyed his suggestion of waving and smiling. If the smiles were fixed, and the head turnings were more to look at everything but the faces, the commoners weren't to know.

He said nothing as he observed the faces of the guests, and sensed the sincere elation the people had for him, personally.

As soon as the carriage left the crowd again, the musicians now on the dais began to play a gentle melody. On this occasion, the traditional welcome dance would be performed only by Jono Reslic and his consort and Xyron with his. Then their children would join in and begin to welcome the commoners and important guests into the dance. Commoners and Royalty mingled freely on these occasions and the dancing and banqueting would last well into the night.

Tymoros intended that his children would have the chance to enjoy some of the special foods prepared for the guests. After all, they were the guests of honour. There would be future occasions for them to join in such revelry, but right now, his children were just about ready to fall asleep, though still too tense to do so.

"Aldiv," Tymoros summoned his attendant who was waiting where the carriage stopped. "Have some food sent to my sanctum, and refreshments. See if Xyron has any instructions. I think it has been a very long day."

He saw Aldiv flick a glance at Tymos and Kryslie before he nodded and departed. Tymoros helped his children from the carriage, walked with them to the beam in point, and took them to his apartment. When he entered his sanctum, Aldiv had already arranged three comfortable chairs around the low table. Platters of mixed delicacies awaited them and a tray of drinks sat on a sideboard.

"Help yourself," Tymos invited his children, when they seemed only to want to flop back in the chairs. "If you are feeling as worn out as you look, you need to eat. I know I do. Try these little pastries. They are something Tanya introduced to the palace cooks."

Once they began, Tymos and Kryslie found he was correct and began to point out various delicacies to each other. Later, Aldiv brought over drinks, and he watched as the sleeping draught Xyron had prepared for them took effect, first relaxing the residual tension of being the focus of so much attention, and then easing them into sleep.

Delia and Morov arrived when summoned by Aldiv to take charge of the children.

“Xyron will come by later and check them,” Tymoros advised the attendants. “If all is well, you can assist them to their own apartments. I would like you to keep watch for the remainder of the night. They both need to be rested for tomorrow.”

Chapter 7 - First Lessons

Tymos woke and stretched, enjoying the sensation of lying in a soft bed. His enjoyment lasted only a moment because his attendant came into view as he pulled back the privacy curtain.

“Prince Tymos, it is time for you to be dressed. His Excellency is expecting you directly after breakfast.”

“What for?” Tymos asked suddenly aware that he had no idea of where he was or why he was there. “I thought I would be out in the garden again today.”

The attendant was a young man who was only recently out of schooling. He tried, unsuccessfully, to hide a smile.

“Since you have been given this apartment in your father’s palace, I conclude that you have now recovered sufficiently to begin lessons.”

“Lessons in what?”

“All the Royal Children are educated, Prince Tymos. However, since it is His Excellency the President who is expecting you – I believe it will be to organize your Physical Skills Program.”

“O...K,” Tymos said thinking furiously. He recalled many disjointed images and snippets of conversation. He remembered the tall red haired man who was their foster father – His Majesty Tymoros. He remembered that they had made him and his sister citizens of this world and they had been presented to a crowd of people. That’s right - they had come from somewhere else – Earth, that was where. He remembered some children his age and being in a garden ...

“Prince Tymos I have your garments ready to change into,” Morov reminded his charge.

“I think I have a lot to learn,” Tymos suggested, hoping his attendant would comment.

“You do indeed, Prince Tymos. The other Royal Children your age have had a good six years of education already. Do you require help getting dressed?”

“No,” was the instinctive answer and Tymos was not surprised that the garment he was given was purple and gold but he could not remember ever having put it on himself. “I think I can manage. I don’t mean to insult you but I can’t remember your name.”

“I’m Morov, Prince Tymos. You have been under sedation until this morning so I am quite pleased that you are better. It is my duty to assist you in any way I can.”

“Where is my sister, Morov?” Tymos asked climbing out of the bed and finding that he was wearing a pale blue one-piece garment.

“She went to her own apartment, Prince Tymos.”

“Why do I feel like I don’t know what I am doing?” Tymos finally asked.

“It is because you were raised on some distant world. If they had allowed you to come sooner it would have been easier for you to adapt to being here. I do not know why they kept you there until you were this old but it is not my place to ask. I was told that His Excellency Professor Governor Xyron has suppressed your memories so that is why you feel bewildered. It is better that you have no alien notions to distract you from your learning.”

“Can you please show me how to put this thing on?” Tymos felt embarrassed by having to ask how to dress himself because he felt he should know. Morov helped him in such a matter of fact way that Tymos felt less stupid.

“You aren’t the first Royal Child to come here as an adolescent, I knew one – a child of two missionaries and she had a very hard time. She wanted to tell the teachers how to do things. However, you are the first I have heard about of such high rank. That is probably why His Excellency the President is taking a personal interest in you.”

“I’d rather he didn’t,” Tymos muttered. “He scares me.”

“He’s strict and fair,” Morov admitted. “He is somewhat overpowering, but that is because he is the bearer of the Sword of Judgment. Just do exactly as he tells you and you won’t get into trouble.”

Tymos passed the advice to Kryslie as she joined him in a small room on the ground floor of the palace prior to their appointment with the President. She was dressed in the same type of one-piece outfit as he but hers was red with gold trim. Their attendants transmitted them from the High King's palace to the President's palace and now waited with them outside a door while Morov announced them. Yeven, the President's attendant ushered them into the room and took Tymos and Kryslie to a small office off what looked like a gymnasium. Morov, and Kryslie's attendant Delia, waited by the first door.

Jono Reslic, seated behind a small desk sat back in his chair but did not rise as Tymos and Kryslie entered. Nor did he invite them to sit. The room was empty except for the table and Reslic's seat. Yeven quietly withdrew.

"I have prepared a training schedule for you," he announced without preamble. "You will be expected to adhere to it faithfully. It is initially designed to help you build up muscle and muscle tone and to strengthen you. You will progress to a formal study of gymnastics, which will teach you balance and physical control as well as improve your coordination. I will personally be supervising this part of your education because you are both Heir Designates and totally untrained, a situation that we must rectify as soon as possible. As you progress, I will modify your schedule. We will begin right away."

He stood up then and led the way out to his private gymnasium.

In the centre of the floor were padded mats. All the other equipment was pushed back near the walls.

"Let's see what you can do."

Jono Reslic called the attendants over, asked them to demonstrate some basic warm up exercises, and then told Tymos and Kryslie to try them. Some were easy; others such as standing on one leg and holding the other up were harder than expected. Reslic made no comment, aware that even though the two children had learnt to walk around in the higher gravity of Tymorea, they still had to adjust their internal balance. Time after time, they tried and always fell over. When they seemed on the verge of anger at their failure, he had the attendants provide a prop to hold them up.

After an hour, of doing various exercises, he permitted them to rest for five minutes before he began to test them on some of his equipment. Tymos found that he was good at doing a range of movements on the wooden horse and at rope climbing while Kryslie did better at tumbling and the parallel bars. Neither did well at walking along the wooden balance beam.

Reslic kept them busy all morning and praised their efforts.

With an injunction to arrive there every morning after breakfast, he dismissed them.

An exhausted Tymos and Kryslie needed the encouragement of their attendants to eat the lunch that the kitchen staff sent to their apartments. When all they wanted was to sleep until dinnertime, a servant summoned them for more lessons.

Firstly, they were introduced to Madame Wynn, an elderly woman who was to teach them how to read and write the formal Tymorean script.

Then, Madame Vera, a middle-aged woman with fading red hair, took them to a medium sized chamber. The room was empty of furniture, had soft floor mats and shelves on the walls bearing a variety of statues, vases, pictures and other odd objects. She began to explain the basics of personal meditation but did not comment when their meditative trance became a power nap.

Late in the afternoon, they met Stenn, Denlic and Lexina who taught them a new game, one designed to increase their hand and eye coordination. It had been a very long day.

Tymos and Kryslie knew the other children had lessons, but they only saw their three friends briefly each afternoon and only for long enough to learn a new exercise. For the rest of the day, from early breakfast to evening meal, they were busy learning essential skills.

In addition to physical skills, there was the Tymorean language to learn to read and write, and a vocabulary to expand. They had to learn the Tymorean numerical notations and to learn the symbols for a multitude of places, actions, warnings and other concepts. Even the subtly different everyday routines, for although they had no memories of their past, their bodies were used to doing things a certain way – instinctively – and they needed to learn the Tymorean way.

Through all the lessons, they were still becoming used to the higher gravity, still working to find their internal balance and to build their strength.

By the end of the evening meal each day, they were exhausted. They had no energy left to object to the enforced early bedtime.

However, in the morning when they were fresher, when they had their session with Reslic, it was different.

Their human instincts surfaced; the reactions that had started to become a pattern before they had been taken from school. Though they couldn't remember that life, both Tymos and Kryslie began to resent the feeling of being forced to keep doing exercises at Reslic's direction. When they tired and wanted to rest, he forced them to continue. His terse and cutting comments angered them, even though he only spoke the truth. His comparisons of their level of skill, when compared to the skills of much younger Tymorean children, made them flush with humiliation.

Early on, they learnt that walking out of Reslic's gymnasium wasn't possible. They tried several times and failed. There was a door, but when they wanted to find it, they couldn't. If servants left it open when they came in with refreshments, they still couldn't go through it.

Seeing Reslic simply watching their attempts without reacting, angered them. He waited for them to return in frustration, or if they didn't, he merely walked over to them and set them the next exercise.

After a time, both Tymos and Kryslie began to get the idea that Reslic's calm reaction to their rebellion was because they were insignificant in power compared to him and all their attempts to fight were useless. They began to realise they were acting like caged birds, fluttering madly to get out and only succeeding in tiring themselves further.

However, even though they were beginning to realise that he could easily swat them for their behaviour, they didn't yet accept his right to order them around.

At no time did either Tymos or Kryslie start to question their own reactions. Reslic's calm comment on needing to master the quick temper characteristic of red heads was not accepted with the same calmness. It served to inflame their resentments further.

In turn, their ability to perform the required exercises became less and less, usually ending up with a fit of temper from either Tymos or Kryslie – whoever was performing at the time.

Reslic ignored the tantrums and the sulking, until Tymos went one-step further and shouted, "Well if you are so damn clever, you do it!"

Kryslie, taking a few minutes break before her turn, saw the stern look on Reslic's face tighten, and then watched him do exactly what he had asked of her brother. To her, and to Tymos, the exercise had seemed complicated and meaningless, yet the President performed the movements so smoothly that it looked like a baby exercise.

Although still angry, the deceptive ease with which Reslic had performed it fuelled Tymos's determination and belief that he could do it too. He still failed, only this time his determination was more stubborn than his anger. With only mild prompting, he kept at the exercise until he had achieved praise from Reslic.

This time, Tymos could not refute the advice that anger was counter productive to success. He kept it in mind for the rest of the day.

Kryslie tried to remember the advice too, for she could sense faint annoyance from Reslic despite his calm façade. She tried to master her own resentment, not wishing to make him angry but her resolution was soon tested.

“Kryslie!” she heard her name spoken sharply, and realised that she must have dozed off while Tymos was climbing the ropes and swinging from one to the next.

She caught herself before she toppled sideways from her position propped against the wall. She felt her face getting hot as Reslic stared at her.

“Well?” he prompted.

She had no idea what he had just asked her to do. Tymos approached and muttered, “He told you to climb the rope.”

Still with his eyes on her, she moved to the nearest rope. When she glanced at Reslic for confirmation, his face remained impassive.

Trying to find the strength, she began to climb. Half way up, her arms lost all strength, and she dropped to the padded mat.

“You will not be allowed to leave until you make it to the top,” Reslic told her implacably.

Realising that the lesson was almost over, enabled Kryslie to try again. This time she made it to the top, but hardly had the strength to stay there or do a controlled descent.

“Move across to the far rope and climb down,” Reslic told her.

When Kryslie didn’t move, he added, “You will miss your midday meal if you stay there.”

Once again, she made an effort, and managed to swing across two of the five ropes, before her arms and legs stopped gripping the rope. She slid down, the rope burning her hands and inner thighs.

“You have fallen into a pit of slavering, starving, canines. I suggest that you climb out quickly,” Reslic said in a perfectly serious tone.

Kryslie swore under her breath, not realising she used English words in lieu of Tymorean curses.

“This isn’t a play group,” Reslic now sounded impatient.

“It isn’t a pit of dogs either,” Kryslie snapped back.

“Perhaps there are no canines,” Reslic agreed, walking closer. “But I am here and I am waiting.”

One more glance at Reslic and she was moving again, only she took up the fourth rope, and not the one she had dropped from. She took heart when Reslic didn’t comment. As she forced herself up, inch by inch, she glanced at her twin. He looked almost asleep against the balance beam. She thought to herself that he had better watch it too, Reslic had been at him enough already that day.

Kryslie kept Reslic’s attention on herself, by inching up the rope, and when at the top transferring slowly to the next. Feeling sure he was waiting for her to fail, and would make harsh remarks if she did, she found the stubbornness to inch down the rope until she was less than her own height from the ground. Then she deliberately dropped. As she had intended, the noise roused her brother. He jerked straight and came over.

“I hope you carefully consider the day’s lesson,” Reslic told them both. “I do not set exercises that are beyond your capability. They should be easy, but not if you are angry. Anger and resentment waste energy you could be using for the exercise.”

Neither acknowledged the advice, because both emotions were still simmering in their minds, and as soon as they were dismissed, they were glad to be taken back to their apartments.

After a refreshing sonic shower and a high-energy lunch, they went to their afternoon meditation session. Only then did they realise that they were not as tired as they used to be, that their stamina was increasing. They approached the mental exercises in logic, calculating, and data

recall quite refreshing. Madam Vera's praise carried them through Madam Wynn's language and writing class. They memorised fifty new words, with their meanings and learnt the written form and the correct pronunciation with only three repetitions.

The afternoon's session in the garden with their friends was more like a game. Stenn led them to where a pole was set up with a ring attached. Next to it was a similar structure that had a square board behind the ring.

"My father had this made up, but I have never tried this exercise myself," Stenn admitted. "It must be another of my father's weird ideas. He says we have to get a ball through the ring from the top. I'll have a try first."

The set up meant nothing to Tymos and Kryslie either, until they watched their friend's inept attempts. Then some buried instincts roused and Tymos found a forgotten skill returning. Kryslie found the same thing happening – her body recalled how to play basketball and netball, even though her mind had forgotten the games. She and Tymos found themselves teaching skills to their friends.

When the session finished, they were elated and mentally calm when they returned to their apartments for their evening meal.

Neither tried to protest about bedtime, but neither were they yet ready to sleep. They pondered the day's lessons and began to feel they were at last achieving something.

On a morning four weeks after they began lessons, Jono Reslic was accompanied by Xyron when he took Tymos and Kryslie out into the garden for the morning's physical skills session. The normal cadre of attendants, posted themselves around the chosen clearing, supplemented by some of the palace guards.

Reslic had not implied that the day's session was anything out of the ordinary, but the change in venue was distracting the students from noticing the security guards. Having them there was routine, but he did not want them to think it was a lack of trust. All groups of students, when out in the gardens, had security present.

"Stretching exercises," Reslic called, attracting the attention of the twins. He was pleased by their immediate attention to his direction. They had stopped resisting his lessons and were now a pleasure to teach. He could not fault their memory, for they worked through each exercise, in the correct order, missing none.

"Two laps around a circle inside the ring of attendants," he directed next. He saw Morov, Tymos's attendant give his master a grin as he went past.

After that, he had his students perform all the different exercises that he had taught them. Each one was designed to help master some aspect of Royal power. He also tested their memory for he gave them several exercises at once. Each time, he noted that both Tymos and Kryslie paused a moment, as if repeating his directions mentally. He did not need to repeat the instructions.

Reslic saw Xyron nod briefly and he called for a break and told his students to have a drink. Both were flushed from the exercise but only breathing a little faster than normal. He stayed back when Xyron went over to speak to them, and use the pretext of checking their pulse rate to release his control of their power.

"Excellent," Reslic heard Xyron praise them. "Your fitness level has improved greatly. Keep doing as well as you are."

Xyron returned to stand next to Reslic. "They seem stable. I felt no change in pulse rate when I removed my controls."

"We will see," Reslic replied quietly. He called for Tymos and Kryslie to repeat the previous exercise.

He watched closely, and saw Tymos almost stumble, and seem uncoordinated for a few moments. Kryslie paused between exercises, and finished the next few with greater deliberation.

He caught the look that passed between Tymos and Kryslie and knew they were aware of the change in themselves.

Before they had a chance to think about it, he calmly called for them to repeat the exercise yet again. They obeyed him, and again performed flawlessly. He called them over.

“How do you feel?” he asked them, seeing them almost glance at each other again.

“Fine now, Sir,” Kryslie admitted first. She knew better than to try making excuses for doing the exercises poorly. Yet she had messed up because she had felt most odd. “I felt clumsy for a while. I don’t know why.”

“I did too,” Tymos confirmed. “Sort of weak and light headed. I felt really off balance.”

“And now?” Xyron asked neutrally. He waited for Tymos to find the words he wanted.

“Still a bit strange – sort of lighter, but sort of more solid too.”

“Excellent,” Xyron told him.

“That we were feeling awkward, Sir?” Kryslie asked. “I didn’t like feeling like that.”

“Do you still feel that way?” Xyron asked her.

“No...Actually, now I feel better than I can remember.”

“The awkward feeling should not occur again,” Xyron reassured them. “Though if it does, you should tell me or your teacher at the time. This time, when you felt strange, it was because your body was adjusting to your power waking up. You needed time to assimilate the change in your balance point. You both did that very quickly. I am satisfied that you are ready to start having lessons in the small lyceum. Have your attendants bring you there in the morning.”

Reslic saw the looks of pleasure on the faces of both Tymos and Kryslie. They deserved the praise. They had improved a very great deal in a short time. However, there was still half an hour of their lesson to go.

“Run three times around the circle, moving in and out of the attendants.” He hid a smile at the grins of mischief that appeared on his student’s faces.

Tymos and Kryslie entered the High King’s suite in time for the evening meal. Tanya greeted them as usual with a warm smile, and put down her sewing to come and greet them.

“I have heard you will be joining your cousins in the small lyceum tomorrow,” she remarked, giving Kryslie a hug and allowing Tymos to kiss her cheek.

“Yes,” Tymos agreed. “So we were told. I had not realised that Governor Xyron had been controlling our power until then. Do you know why they did that?”

“I am sure there was an excellent reason,” Tanya reassured them. “It is possibly because you came into it so late. It is not something I know much about, being a commoner by birth. You could ask your father.”

“Is he here?” Kryslie asked, glancing around the room that displayed more of Tanya’s influence than that of their foster father. With the door to his ‘sanctum’ shut, she didn’t know if he was there.

“Not yet. Today he has been hearing criminal cases – something to do with a riot in Basiq,” Tanya explained. “He may be late.”

Kryslie sighed. “I am looking forward to tomorrow. I’d like to see Stenn Reslic again. We’ve been so busy with our private lessons, we never see our friends any more.”

“Well, don’t let him distract you from your work. Stenn is quite a prankster,” Tanya warned. “All harmless fun, but I have heard he is not applying himself.”

Tymos grimaced, and Tanya caught the expression. “He should have his father for a teacher. The President does not let us ‘not apply’ ourselves.”

“All our teachers are like that,” Kryslie commented. “It’s always push, push, push, like we are five years behind everyone else. Surely we were educated before we came here.”

“We probably were,” Tymos agreed. “But you would think we were dirt scratching savages back then.”

Neither of them was aware that Tymoros had transmitted into the suite, and they jumped when he spoke behind them.

"I haven't heard anyone say that," he admonished gently.

Tymos blushed faintly. "So why do they keep trying to teach us stuff we know?"

"Perhaps you could propose a reason," Tymoros suggested. He turned away slightly and let Aldiv take off the formal brocade over robe he had worn as judge in the law court.

Tymos stared at his back, but Kryslie proposed, "Well, we have never learnt any of the history, and geography of this planet. Or the language..."

"Yes, alright," Tymos agreed. "But the maths and science stuff is so basic."

"Should I suggest to Larros that he start each topic with the test and teach you what you don't get right?" Tymoros proposed. He looked less imposing in the loose fitting long sleeved white shirt.

"That would work," Tymos said after a moment of thought. "I mean I don't mind having a brief revision, but it's wasting time to go over pages of examples. He could save himself time and get onto what we don't know, faster."

"Indeed," Tymoros agreed. "Come through to my sanctum and tell me how your day went."

He took a data pad from Aldiv and glanced at it as he passed through the door that his attendant held open.

"When will you want your evening meal, your Majesty?" Aldiv asked.

"Have the kitchen servers send it up in an hour, will you?" Tymoros decided.

Aldiv nodded and closed the door after Tymos and Kryslie.

"I had an excellent report from Jono on your test this morning," Tymoros commented as he sat in his favourite leather armchair, and gestured for Tymos and Kryslie to sit in the other two chairs.

Kryslie took the invitation but stayed on the front edge of the seat. Tymos chose to sit cross-legged on the floor. He blurted the question that was on his mind.

"Why did we have our power controlled? I mean, most of our teachers so far have reiterated the 'don't take your power for granted' theme. Larros said it when I tried to tell him I knew how to get the areas of geometric shapes. He said just because we had the power to intuit the answer, didn't mean we shouldn't learn how get there step by step. It made no sense. I don't understand how I was supposed to be doing it differently."

"And now?" Tymoros asked without challenge.

"Now? I still think the same."

"What about your physical training?" Tymoros prompted.

"I know I felt odd this morning and messed up a drill, but I did it again, well enough. So what was the point?"

"Tymos, you and your sister came into your power late without the benefit of the early lessons given to all Royal Children. We needed time to give you special teaching and for you both to prove you had mastered the basic skills before you could safely join the other children."

"What do you mean – safely?" Tymos asked, with faint resentment.

"Your power began to manifest before you came here. Neither of you were handling it well then, now that you have the necessary techniques, you are doing better," Tymoros explained. "The matter is no longer important, so long as you keep heeding your trainers. I have had good reports from your other teachers too. They all say you are learning very quickly, and that was without your power to help – just using your natural aptitude."

"But why 'safely,'" Kryslie persisted with the question.

"It was really a matter of ensuring you were in control of the level of power you have, which is a requirement to be allowed to study in the small lyceum."

The answer really didn't satisfy Kryslie, but she decided to let it pass. Instead, she thought on the new lesson of the afternoon. "You know, Tym, there is one thing that made me feel I had something I didn't have before."

“What?”

“You know how we started to be taught to use a transmitter?”

“All that memorising of beam in points and so on?” Tymos commented.

“That, and the implication we would be able to use one, and Rowan’s comment that the humans we grew up with couldn’t.” Kryslie saw her brother thinking on that.

“That’s a point,” Tymos agreed. “So what will we be learning in the small lyceum, that we can’t learn with our private tutors?”

Tymoros smiled wryly. “I expect the most important lesson will be patience. You will be in with the younger students, but still following your personalised learning programs. Though I will suggest that the science and maths be dropped for a time.”

Tymos felt vindicated. Tymoros smiled faintly in amusement before continuing his explanation.

“The older students in the small lyceum are taught various mental and physical skills to prepare them for the onset of second stage, and you will learn these with them. You will also be tested to determine your educational level in the various physical, social and cognitive sciences. The results of that testing will determine your placement when you graduate to the large lyceum.”

Tymos gave a resigned shrug. “So we have to reach this second stage thing before we stop being taught with the babies. Oh, well, at least it will be a change from full on exercise all morning.”

Kryslie saw Tymoros’s faint smile and guessed, “I don’t think we will be having a complete break from exercise.”

Tymos glanced at her and then at Tymoros.

“No, indeed. Perrin Reslic will be taking over your physical skills program for a time. He teaches the preparatory skills I mentioned.”

“So what is this second stage stuff?” Tymos demanded. “I’ve never heard mention of it.”

Tymoros understood his foster-son’s impatience; he and Kryslie had a great deal to learn and so far had only touched the basics.

“I am not sure how much you know or understand,” he began, knowing he needed to be clear. “The power you and Kryslie have received comes to us from the Guardians of Peace. It is inherited by each generation of the three Governors – those that are referred to as Royalty.”

Kryslie nodded, recalling what Tanya had said earlier. “And it usually starts showing when a child is ten or so.”

“Yes and the early training we give our children is to prepare them so that they recognise the signs and can compensate for the physical changes. Each child is different, but we can generally determine from the power level at this first stage, what their adult potential will be. When the child is older, their power blossoms to their full adult potential. This is what we refer to as ‘second stage’.”

“So, how long will we have to wait? We are sixteen already,” Tymos asked.

“While it is generally true that those of us with the strongest power reach second stage at an earlier age, it seldom occurs before a child is thirteen, and rarely later than fifteen,” Tymoros explained. “However, the children of our missionaries that were raised on other worlds often come late into their power, so I really cannot predict when you will reach second stage.”

“Perhaps we won’t,” Tymos suggested, but he suddenly turned to look at Kryslie. “What?”

She seemed a trifle pale. “No, I think we will. Do you remember, soon after we got here – the reason why we have the rank we do?”

“We haven’t really even mastered the first stage,” Tymos said turning equally pale.

“What if we aren’t ready?” Kryslie said in a frightened voice. “We are not even really aware of what we have.”

Tymoros leant forward. “Your teachers know that, and will be training you to be ready. Listen to them, obey them, and don’t resent the strict discipline and restrictions we impose on you. You will not control your power unless you can first control yourself both physically and mentally. It is to this end that Jono and Xyron aim with your training. Remember too, that I will always be ready to help you.”

“But what if we aren’t ready?” Kryslie persisted. “It might happen tomorrow.” She moved from her chair to sit by Tymoros’s feet. He leant down to place a hand on her shoulder.

Tymos crept to Tymoros’s other side. He gave them both a hug.

“You must be ready. The Elders have foreseen that you will be as powerful as I am, one day. So don’t waste a moment. Learn as fast as you can.”

“We will,” Kryslie promised, sensing the concern of her foster father, and still feeling a little afraid. “But I don’t think we can learn any faster – they keep us so busy, we never see our friends and seldom have time to spend with you, since your duties often keep you out late, and we are not allowed up past our bed time.”

Tymoros brushed his hand over her hair, and noted the glints of red amongst the brown. “There are reasons for keeping you busy, beyond simply teaching you what you need to know. However, now that you are ready for the small lyceum, your evenings will be less hectic. Perhaps Tanya and I can teach you the things that you do not know about living in a royal palace.”

He aimed to distract them from their fears of the future, and he seemed to succeed.

Kryslie looked up and said, “Tanya has promised to teach me to dance and to play the harp.”

“Dancing?” Tymos echoed in disgust. “Must I?”

“It is an important part of social life at court,” Tymoros stressed in mild rebuke. “In fact, you are both overdue for some lessons in court etiquette. You will have to learn how to behave on formal occasions and how to comport yourselves in the presence of commoners. Not to mention the correct greetings for those of rank in the palace and amongst the commoners.”

Tymos decided to change the subject. “I would rather learn to play that strategy board game, Father.”

Tymoros chuckled. “Then perhaps, after we have eaten, I will teach you.

Chapter 8 - Small Lyceum

Tymos and Kryslie arrived at the beam in point for the small lyceum, accompanied by their attendants. They knew to vacate the tiled circle to free it up for the next arrivals. When they walked into the assembly area, it was to become the focus of over sixty pairs of eyes. Most of those present were aged between ten and thirteen, two looked older. The youngest ones were under the eyes of a female servant wearing blue skirt and shirt.

“Where do we go now?” Kryslie asked Delia as she casually looked around the circular area. The walls were decorated with maps and pictures of vehicles and animals. Several windows gave views of the gardens - with buildings showing above the trees.

“The children go in when the time chime goes for nine,” Delia explained. “You are to wait for Governor Xyron. I expect he will take you in with him.”

“We are the tallest here,” Tymos murmured, self-consciously.

“Not quite, and not the oldest either, Prince Tymos,” Morov murmured after glancing around. “I would have expected one or two here to have been apprenticed by now.”

One of those two older looking boys sauntered over.

“Zacary,” Morov greeted brusquely.

“They’ve got you baby sitting commoners, have they, Morov?” Zacary gave the two new students a dismissive head to toe glance. They were both dressed as casually, and neatly, as most of the other students.

Tymos saw Morov’s fists clench and spoke before his attendant could produce a retort. “I wouldn’t be here if that was all I was. We came from off world. Is that why you are here too?”

The boy’s face reddened, but he claimed, “No, I am due to go off with my parents soon.”

He strode away as the chimes marked the hour, and joined the queue of students entering the inner room using a second beam in point. He glanced back and his eyes narrowed as he saw Governor Xyron arrive and walk towards the new students.

“We will be back for you at lunchtime,” Delia said quickly, just before bowing in greeting to Governor Xyron.

Tymos and Kryslie copied the gesture, aware of their ignorance of the correct protocol.

“I will take you in and introduce you to your tutor,” Xyron said brusquely.

When they arrived in the oval shaped lyceum, the other students were already at work, separated into smaller groups by movable partitions.

“You will be working down the end at the terminals. Niklas will oversee your study program and will have your lesson schedule,” Xyron explained, walking briskly down the central passage, and expecting Tymos and Kryslie to follow.

With a minimum of fuss, Niklas took charge, bowed respectfully to Xyron, and the Governor strode off to do a round of visiting each class.

“I have assigned each of you a computer terminal,” Niklas told them. “Have you used one before?”

“No sir,” Kryslie admitted.

Tymos shook his head. “I’ve heard of them.”

From the next terminal over, Zacary smirked in their direction. Niklas didn’t notice as he began to instruct his new students in the basics of computer use, directed them to a language program and told them to get to work.

“If you two provincials need any help, just ask,” Zacary offered.

“That is kind of you, thank you,” Kryslie said, since she was the nearest to him.

“What’s your name?” Zacary asked, in a muted voice when Niklas was not close enough to hear.

“Krys. My brother is Tym.” Kryslie decided that there was no point in mentioning their titles, and in truth, she was still uncomfortable with being called, ‘Princess’.

“You related to the Governor then?” Zacary asked.

“Governor Tymoros, yes,” Kryslie admitted. “He is fostering us.”

“Your parents are missionaries then?”

“I expect so. We don’t remember them,” Kryslie admitted, but didn’t mention why.

“You don’t have the red hair of his line. You must be a few generations removed.”

Kryslie shrugged, and was glad to see Niklas returning. She heard Tym mutter, “He’s going to find trouble if he keeps distracting us.”

They had peace for a while until Niklas walked away again. Zacary stood up, stretched, and casually walked to see what they were doing.

“Language lessons? You really are yokels aren’t you?” he commented.

Kryslie hid a sigh and asked with apparent innocence, “What’s a xylanthrocite?”

She received the distinct impression that Zacary didn’t know.

“That? It’s basic – look it up on the compedia. That way you will remember it for next time.”

Kryslie winked at Tymos and said politely, “Yes, we have heard that a few times already.”

Zacary went back to his work, and Kryslie went back to working through an extensive scientific glossary of terms. She was working from the end to the start and Tymos had started at the beginning.

An hour after starting work, they were interrupted by Rowan, one of Xyron’s cousins. He was teaching them about the process of transmitting themselves from place to place.

For this second lesson, he took them to a vacant alcove and continued to drill them in the locations of every beam in position on the estate, and he insisted they learn these by heart. When he was satisfied with their recall, he had them calculating distance and direction between two locations by mental arithmetic.

They now knew that there was three ways to use transmitters. The first was to input the code for one of the permanent beam in points, second was to calculate distance and direction for a line of sight transmission, and the third was by having a vivid picture of the intended destination. This last method could only be used by people with a high level of power. Rowan expressly forbid them to try it.

So far, they hadn’t been allowed to transmit themselves, but that day, Rowan handed each of them a small device, made of metal and shaped to fit comfortably into the palm of the hand. It had a tiny screen, a touch pad and three tiny lights. One light turned from red to green when they had held it for a while. Rowan drew their attention to it.

“That means that the unit is charged and ready to use. It requires Royal power to operate. The stronger your power, the faster it operates. However, the unit’s maximum power is only enough to move one person and only within the Royal Estate.”

For the moment, Tymos and Kryslie accepted his statement; both were keen to try using the transmitter.

“Now, safety rules,” Rowan stated. He met their eyes to be sure they were listening. “It is preferred that you transmit to and from the standard beam in points. We have safeguards installed there to prevent accidents.”

“Like two people trying to arrive at the same time?” Tymos asked, seeing the potential for that.

“Exactly.” Rowan nodded, looking pleased with them. “What usually happens is that the device creates a force field around you, so if you arrive at the same time as another, you slide apart. We amplify the effect at the beam in points.”

Rowan saw comprehension on his student’s faces.

“When you intend to transmit line of sight, or from anywhere other than a beam in point, you move away from other people first and don’t aim to arrive in the middle of a group. If you try to transmit too close to someone, the transmission will fail, and you risk harm to the other person. If you arrive in the middle of a group, you won’t have room to re-materialise, and prolonging the process will make you ill and risk giving injury to those in the group. Backflow trauma is not pleasant. In theory, you should be able to sense the force field and know to move out of the way.”

Both Tymos and Kryslie had questions about the science behind the transmitters, but decided to ask them later because they wanted to try the process for themselves.

“I’ll take you to the beam in point in the main hall and we will practice from there,” Rowan directed.

Once there he asked, “You have both been moved this way a great deal – have you ever felt odd during the transfer?”

Tymos’s “no” echoed Kryslie’s “never.”

“Good, but we will take this slowly. Moving yourself is different because it uses your own inner power and some people cannot tolerate it. I will try this with each of you in turn. We will transmit from here to the beam in point in your father’s palace. You know it, I believe?”

Two nods.

“Prince Tymos, you first.”

Kryslie waited, alone, as first Tymos and then Rowan blinked out of her sight. She barely had long enough to realise that she was completely alone for the first time that she could remember, when her twin returned followed by Rowan.

“Wow!” Tymos said. His eyes were alight with excitement.

“How do you feel?” Rowan asked him.

“Great.”

“Any nausea, blurred vision, headache?”

“No.”

“Excellent. Your turn Princess Kryslie. To your father’s palace.”

Kryslie set her device to the location after the green light came on, moved into the tiled circle and activated her device. She felt the familiar tingling sensation, was aware of a very bright light, and then saw the familiar sight of the entrance hall of her father’s palace.

“Back again,” Rowan directed, and Kryslie complied.

On her return, she told her twin, “Wow indeed.” She had to answer the same questions as her twin.

“That’s enough for today,” Rowan told them, putting his hands out for the devices. “We will practice more tomorrow. I will take you back inside. And you can show me where each beam in point is on a map of the estate.”

Rowan brought up a map on Tymos’s terminal, and began quizzing them. When he asked for details of the area around each location, neither Tymos nor Kryslie could answer. He looked back at them thoughtfully. “You have been here, what...three months? Have they not appointed a mentor to show you around?”

Tymos shrugged. “We’ve had lots of basic stuff to learn.”

His casual statement was enough of an explanation, since they had only just started learning to use a transmitter.

“I will find out what can be done. You need to be able to visualise each beam in point...so you can practice that technique.”

“I thought you said...” Tymos began. He intended to say that Rowan had forbidden them to visualise, but Zacary interrupted.

“I could be their mentor, Master Rowan.”

Rowan’s face betrayed a brief flash of annoyance, which might have been for Zacary’s rudeness.

“I will pass on your offer, Zacary, but it not my decision to make. It is likely an older student will be selected.”

When Rowan was well away, Zacary scowled.

“It was kind of you to offer,” Kryslie thanked him politely, but he just turned back to his terminal.

Nikolas strode back. “We have a short break now. There are mid-morning drinks and snacks out in the assembly hall. Zacary and Tobias can show you the routine. Do you wish me to take you out?”

“Yes thank you,” Kryslie agreed.

Zacary nudged Tobias, who had been engrossed in his computer all morning. The dark haired boy finally noticed the new students.

“Hi,” was all he said before going to transmit to the assembly hall.

Once there, Zacary explained the set up very tersely and went to help himself to food.

By the end of the break, Tymos had confirmed his initial impression of Zacary.

“Arrogant bully,” Tymos murmured to Krys. He is bigger than all the others and just pushes them out of the way.”

“And ignores the teachers telling him to be gentle,” Kryslie added. “He doesn’t belong here.”

“Neither do we,” Tymos reminded her. “But it is our fault for being late starters. I wonder what his problem is.”

“Tobias is deaf, which may be part of the reason he is there. But Morov was surprised to see him. I guess they must still expect those two to...grow up.”

“I wonder if everyone does grow up,” Kryslie commented idly. There were so many things she wanted to know.

Zacary smirked when Morov and Delia arrived to take Tymos and Kryslie to their lunch. He muttered loudly, so that Morov could hear it, “Baby sitter.”

Delia murmured, “Ignore him, Morov, he’s nothing.”

“But he is being disrespectful to Prince Tymos and...”

Tymos decided to say, “You know and we know, that we are not retarded, backward rustics. What he thinks does not matter. We just ignore him. If he doesn’t know who we are, just think how he will look when he does.”

Delia chuckled and Morov began to grin.

“Your lunch is waiting in your apartments,” Delia advised Tymos and Kryslie. “And before you return, you will need to change into something more suitable for exercise.”

Accepting the advice, Tymos and Kryslie let their attendants take them to their apartments.

Their afternoon exercise group consisted of six other students and they assembled in the garden. Zacary and Tobias were there, and this did not surprise Tymos or Kryslie.

Their instructor introduced himself as Perrin Reslic and he looked like enough to the President to be a brother. The differences were minor, he had his blond hair cropped very short, and his eyes were brown and not blue. He introduced the new students by name, not rank, to the other children. He pointed to each of the others, all children about twelve years old, and spoke their names.

Tory was a smiling, plain faced girl with reddish blond hair. She stood next to Senna who was very blond and was self-confident and reserved. She called the instructor ‘Uncle’. Josep was a highly active boy that never seemed to stay still. He was dark haired, and the other boy was fair, but seemed shy and earnest. His name was Sacul.

During the afternoon, Tymos noticed that Zacary was noticeably attentive to the lesson, and Perrin Reslic was satisfied with his efforts. Tobias was less interested, but he still tried the

exercises. The younger ones were well behaved, did what they were told and were polite to the new members of the class. Tymos did notice that Sacul tended to keep away from Zacary, and had begun to stay nearer himself or Kryslie.

Later, Perrin Reslic dismissed them from the garden. Tymos looked around, but didn't see their attendants. The brown clad guards were still observing from a short distance away.

"What are we meant to do?" Kryslie asked. "I have no idea where we are in relation to the palace – do you?"

"What you know, I know," Tymos murmured. "We could ask the other guards. I most definitely don't want to ask Zacary. He would probably send us off to get lost, and into trouble."

The object of the discussion was still in sight. He had walked off in the direction of a screen of trees. Later, as they waited, they saw Sacul running from the trees, back towards them.

His eyes were red from crying when Kryslie called to him.

With gentle coaxing, they learnt that Zacary had been teasing him, and not for the first time. The older boy claimed to be doing it so Sacul could learn to tolerate it.

Finally, Kryslie told him, "He is right in saying that you should not let what he says bother you, but he shouldn't be making you miserable."

Tymos decided to distract Sacul. "We're rather new around here. Could you show us the way back to the palace?"

"Where have they put you?" Sacul asked, quickly becoming his usual earnest self.

Kryslie told him and he asked, "Have you seen the Prince and Princess?"

"Um," Kryslie glanced at her brother. "We've been too busy to see any one. What do they look like?"

"Well, they probably have red hair like King Tymoros. All his line do," Sacul said. "Are your parents missionaries?" Kryslie didn't want to tell too many lies, and was about to admit to who they were when a cheerful voice called to them. Stenn Reslic trotted into view and came to join them.

"Hi, Sacul, how's things?" Stenn greeted him. "Have you seen Senna?"

"She left with Tory," Sacul told him.

"Little pest," Stenn said with amusement. Then he spoke to Tymos. "So, where are you off to? I haven't seen either of you for ages."

"We asked Sacul to show us the way back, since our attendants haven't shown up," Tymos explained.

"Well, I think they have found you," Stenn nodded off to one side. "Haven't they let you off the leash yet?"

"We've a lot to learn," Kryslie reminded him. "We have to be ready for second stage."

Stenn gave them both a searching look. "Hey, I know the exercises are important, but don't they let you have some fun, ever?"

"Father said we shouldn't be so busy now that we have started at the small lyceum," Kryslie told him.

"Really?" Stenn said, sounding sceptical. "I don't even know why they put you in there. The only ones your age still there are thick wits like Tobias and Zacary."

Stenn turned to Sacul and said conspiratorially, "Don't you let Zacary try to get my friends in trouble, will you?" He winked at the younger boy as Delia and Morov arrived.

"We're sorry, Prince Tymos," Morov began. "We were waiting for you near the small lyceum."

Sacul's eyes had grown as wide as possible. Tymos winked at him and said, "It's a secret. We didn't want people to think we were thick wits. Zacary doesn't know, so don't tell anyone."

"Has the thick wit being bothering you?" Stenn demanded of Tymos.

"Not really," Tymos said. "He was more having a go at Morov for babysitting commoners."

Stenn grinned. “Good camouflage, you having brown hair – but if you ask me, there are glints of red in it now that I didn’t notice when we first met. Anyway, if he gives you trouble you come to me. I will fix him.”

“No need, if he tries then Sacul, Kryslie and I will gang up on him,” Tymos commented.

“Ah, so that’s how it is,” Stenn nodded slowly. “He is clever enough not to be caught out. Do you want me to mention it?”

Sacul drew himself up straight. “I don’t worry about him.”

“Good man,” Stenn commended.

“Lord Stenn, we are expected back for lunch,” Delia interrupted.

“Why can’t we walk back? So we can talk a bit more?” Stenn asked.

“We have our instructions,” Delia told him.

“Too bad,” Stenn said subsiding. “I guess the man and I will have to walk back together.”

Chapter 9 - Unfriendliness

Zacary glanced sideways at the two new students and scowled. They had been in classes a full week and Niklas was full of praise for them. They made him sick, showing him up by working so hard. They needed to ease up a bit, and stop being so standoffish. They thought they didn't need any help, and they wouldn't talk about themselves or where they had come from.

The computer screen in front of him might have vanished for all he was seeing of it. His ears were hearing one of the teachers telling some folk tale – nursery stories – he called them. On the other side, Rowan was praising the yokels for mastering the transmitting practice so quickly and apologising for being unable to take them to view the surrounds of the beam in points that were outside in the gardens. When that could be organised, they would be ready for their own transmitters. What was the rush anyway? The yokels had only been around for a week. Back when he was ten, he had to wait a month for his transmitter. It wasn't fair.

Now Zacary's own resentments began to fester. The major one was still being in with the little kids when all the others his age were in the large lyceum. Well, Tobias didn't count. He was deaf, and was only in the small lyceum to learn about plants and stuff.

Now he recalled how the yokels were always being 'delivered' and 'collected' by personal minders. Fair enough that they didn't have transmitters yet, and you needed one to get into the lyceum, but all other new yokels, waited outside for the teachers to bring them in. What made these two so special? Morov and the old woman must have the job to make sure they didn't run off or something. He had encountered missionaries' brats before. Those raised on backward planets often had pronounced ideas of their own and didn't want to do things the way that the Governor's insisted. He was beginning to agree with those yokels.

He didn't much like what he was doing either. He was learning about the menial jobs that were all they thought him capable of. If he had his way, he'd be off the estate...off the planet.

So maybe these two were not trusted, and the hard work was an act, until they got transmitters and could run away. Well, they would find they couldn't. There was some barrier around the estate so kids couldn't transmit out. He'd tried.

As he sat staring at his computer, ideas came into his head of ways he could make the yokels look bad. After considering the pleasant scenarios for a while, Niklas recalled him to his work.

"I was considering different career paths," he lied immediately. "Do you think I would be allowed to join the Peace Corps? It mentioned that commoners join up. I would like to see more of the world."

Zacary tuned out Niklas's comments after hearing, "I will propose it for you," in favour of listening to the yokel girl trying to wheedle Rowan into letting them walk back for lunch.

"I don't have the authority to allow that," Rowan told her. "You will have to ask permission from Governor Tymoros."

"Everybody else does," the boy was proposing. "At least we can learn our way from here to there. We haven't been allowed to go anywhere much outside."

Zacary laughed to himself. He was now convinced the yokels wanted to run off and it might be fun to make it seem like they had. He'd have to be careful though – he wouldn't want them identifying him.

Two days later, Zacary watched as the two yokels walked back to the palace with their minders. Morov was acting like a tour guide, pointing out features of the garden. He considered that his ideas for causing trouble for the yokels had more chance of working now. Except that Stenn Reslic had already figured out that they were allowed to walk back to lunch. Zacary didn't want to try anything near that one of the president's whelps. In spite of the way Stenn carried on, acting the clown, he was too sharp by half. He saw things that his elders missed.

It occurred to Zacary that he might be able to get back at Stenn at the same time – get all three of them in trouble. He would need to plan things carefully, and remain unseen. As he trudged back to his room in the President’s palace, he tried to think of ways to proceed - finally a brilliant idea blossomed in his mind.

Yes. He would need to wait until his brother Yuri returned from his current duty, but that would be soon – a couple of days. Then he’d have to have a talk with him, after spiking his drink with some of the intoxicant he had found in the palace kitchen. His brother couldn’t tolerate the stuff – that’s why he was a road guard, not a palace guard. When he’d had intoxicant, he wouldn’t remember what he had talked about, would agree to anything, like giving his brother the use of his personal force shield and teaching him to use one. No one would ever know – Yuri would deny it, and he would have it back before he realised he didn’t have it.

In the mean time, he would need to practice doing short line-of-sight flits.

Morov couldn’t hide his amusement. Stenn Reslic was a likable scamp. He had managed to get Prince Tymos and his sister to laugh, even if he had scandalised young Sacul. Morov privately agreed with Stenn - Prince Tymos was working very hard, and should be allowed time to have fun. Even in the evenings, they ate with His Majesty, and afterwards, the High King was instructing them in geography and sociology.

They worked longer hours than palace servants did. Morov worked from dawn to teatime, and was relieved during the night by one of the High King’s junior attendants.

Stenn was trotting backwards as he was having a conversation with them. Morov envied that skill, even as he was wondering if Stenn would trip over. He nearly did, but caught himself in time, but his attention was suddenly on something behind Prince Tymos. Morov glanced back behind him but saw nothing out of the ordinary. Just the usual circle of palace guards keeping with them on either side.

“I am going to ask my father to let you have lunch with us. I can’t see why that would be a problem,” Stenn announced. “I’ll go ask him.”

Stenn trotted off, but not towards the palace.

“I have to agree with him,” Morov commented. “You are both looking pale.”

“We are still acclimatising,” Kryslie told him. “And we need to be ready for second stage.”

“If you work to exhaustion...” Morov began, until Delia interrupted him.

“Governor Reslic and Governor Xyron know what they are doing.”

Morov flushed. Tymos gently punched him on the shoulder. “It’s okay. We still have a lot to learn and you have been a great help teaching us how things work around here.”

Morov had stopped listening to him, and begun to turn around as if sensing danger. Delia stopped them walking and was doing the same.

“Keep close to me,” Delia told Kryslie, even as Morov was moving closer to Tymos.

Several things happened in quick succession - almost simultaneously. Delia shoved Kryslie to one side, Morov felt something strike his head, and Stenn Reslic transmitted back.

Moments later, four palace guards reached the group. One hauled Stenn up from on top of Kryslie, causing Stenn to voice a yelp of pain as he half collapsed in the guards grip. A second guard looked around and demanded, “Where is Prince Tymos?”

Stenn looked around too, and saw Morov unconscious with a bleeding scalp. He compared the scene with what he had visualised before transmitting.

“He was here,” Stenn tried to say but his words sounded garbled. The guard let him collapse onto the ground.

Medics arrived and checked the three that still seemed unconscious. Kryslie was stirring, but she couldn’t sit up.

“What happened?” the medic tending Kryslie demanded.

Stenn recognised Alexon, one of the senior medics, and managed to say, “I thought I saw someone materialise here for an instant. I came back.”

Alexon immediately drew out a palm-sized diagnostic device, scanned Kryslie, and then Delia and Morov. He nodded at the guard who half lifted, half-dragged Stenn closer. His face betrayed how much the rough treatment hurt.

“Hey, it wasn’t me!” Stenn protested. His voice was clearer now.

“You have some backflow trauma,” Alexon told him sternly.

“It wasn’t me,” Stenn repeated. He felt the blood rush from his face, as his father...no, as the President Governor, materialised, demanded a report and ordered a search for Prince Tymos.

Reslic listened to the guards reporting what they had seen. It sounded bad, but it all must have happened fast. Stenn tried to stand, and couldn’t quite. He hadn’t done anything wrong he didn’t even know how he had landed on Kryslie, but if she were hurt, he would be in trouble.

Jono Reslic turned a severe face on his son, and Stenn wanted to sink into the dirt.

“Can you stand yet?” Reslic asked.

“Not quite, Sir,” Stenn admitted, sinking back to the ground.

“How much back flow did you take?”

“Just my left side, Sir,” Stenn admitted further, even though he knew what his father must be thinking. When his father was being official, being his son would give him no advantages.

“Father, I didn’t transmit here too close on purpose. I didn’t.”

“How do you explain the backflow, and landing on Princess Kryslie?” President Reslic spoke in a mild voice, as if there was only one possible explanation.

“I can’t! And I certainly didn’t hit Morov or hide Prince Tymos. I was going to ask you if they could have lunch with us. They need to lighten up a bit – they’ve been working too hard,” Stenn blurted. He noticed the faintest change of expression on his father’s face. He couldn’t tell if it was good or bad.

“The guards saw you arrive,” Reslic observed. “Tell me what you did.”

“I was talking to Tymos and Kryslie, and I thought I saw someone flitting,” Stenn began and he saw his father raise a questioning eyebrow. He flushed.

“Like transmitting from tree to tree – short distances,” Stenn translated the slang term the students used.

“Go on,” Reslic invited.

“I went to find out who it was and warn the little idiot it was dangerous,” Stenn went on in spite of the frown that developed on his father’s face. “When I couldn’t find the person, I looked back at Prince Tymos and I thought I saw someone materialise for an instant, so I went back and the guards pounced on me.”

Reslic studied his son and then asked, “Prince Tymos was there before you transmitted?”

“Yes,” Stenn stated firmly. “And Kryslie was next to Delia, and I aimed to arrive far enough away.”

Stenn watched as the ‘President’ look eased to the ‘father’ look, and felt he could breathe a bit easier.

“You were meant to come and see me directly after your class,” Reslic reminded his son.

Stenn felt his face flush and decided silence would be a good idea. He had been on his way there, but had been deliberately delaying, and hoping to put off the ‘discussion’, he was expecting. This time his father had caught him out - well and truly.

“Yes, Father,” Stenn said meekly.

“Can you get yourself back to the suite? I don’t recommend you transmit until all the tingling disappears,” Reslic asked. When Stenn nodded, he went on. “Go back and wait for me. I may be a while, but I want to talk about this some more.”

Stenn glanced at Kryslie, who was now sitting up. She gave him a weak smile as she let the medics fuss around her.

“He wass...ent...the ...” Kryslie tried to speak, and found her voice wouldn’t produce the words she wanted.

The medic interrupted her. “Don’t try to talk, Princes Kryslie. You have taken some backflow from the repellor field of the transmitter. Just sit quietly. A stretcher is coming to take you to the infirmary.”

Stenn started walking off in the direction of his father’s palace. His entire left side tingled as if it had been asleep and the blood was starting to move again. It felt like a million pins were being stuck into him, repeatedly.

Kryslie watched him go, and then became aware of Reslic squatting down in front of her.

“So, you don’t believe that this was one of my son’s childish pranks?”

Kryslie shook her head, and then needed time to deal with the immediate throbbing pains.

“Don’t try to move too much,” Reslic advised. “You came out of this with only a mild backflow, but it is still not pleasant. Try to keep your answers to a yes or a no.”

“No,” she said.

“Did you see who it was?”

“No. G...g...lowing.”

“You saw a glow?” Reslic asked, seeming to go tense.

“Yes,” Kryslie managed.

“Man shaped?”

“Yes.”

“Taller than you?”

“Bit.”

Reslic became very formal again and stood up. “Go with the medics. I will talk to you again when you are feeling better.”

As the medics lifted her, trying to be gentle but unintentionally aggravating what seemed to be lightning ricocheting around inside her, Kryslie was still aware of Reslic giving orders.

“The culprit may be wearing a personal force shield and may be hiding. Look for signs of shields, and I want an audit of all personal shields. If any are missing, or cannot be produced on demand, I want to know who had access to the missing unit. Check the store where the spares are too.”

Kryslie heard her brother mentioned and listened harder.

“Whoever took Prince Tymos transmitted away. Check the shield logs on the perimeter and search everywhere – in buildings and out.”

Kryslie’s stretcher carriers moved her out of earshot, and she could only watch as sky alternated with trees in her line of sight. She was content to lie without moving as infirmary attendants physically carried her to the infirmary, but a niggling concern for her twin kept intruding on her thoughts.

The infirmary staff moved her to a bed and bustled around. Kryslie was aware that Delia and Morov had also arrived and for a time needed the priority treatment. They took Morov into another room to have his head wound sealed. Alexon came back to her.

“I am going to give you a mild relaxant. You can sleep off the rest of the backflow effects,” he told her.

“No...” she tried to protest, but Alexon pressed a device against her arm and a cool something seemed to spread from that point and soon after, she slept.

When Kryslie awoke, feeling infinitely better, she found Tanya sitting next to her bed, quietly adding tiny stitches to one of her tapestries.

“Where’s my brother?” Kryslie asked at once.

“Awake now?” Tanya asked without answering the question.

Kryslie repeated her question and saw Tanya’s faint frown.

“He’s still missing,” Tanya admitted. “The President has everyone possible looking for him.” She wanted to distract her foster daughter. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine, but Tymos isn’t. You need to find him.”

“How can you know?” Tanya asked.

“He’s my twin,” Kryslie said as if that should answer the question. “He’s cold, hurting, angry, frustrated and ...desperate.”

Tanya looked past Kryslie and made a beckoning gesture. Alexon approached and Tanya repeated what Kryslie had said. He scratched his head, but promised, “I will let my brother know.”

Reslic arrived instead of Xyron.

“You can sense your brother?” he asked sharply. He didn’t seem to disbelieve her.

“A bit,” Kryslie admitted. “Sort of how he feels.”

Tanya moved at a subtle gesture from Reslic, and he sat beside Kryslie. He modified his tone, because he sensed that Kryslie was agitated.

“Calm your mind. Clear it of everything,” Reslic directed, and Kryslie, being used to obeying him, did.

When Reslic felt her agitation ease, and disappear, he said, “Think about your brother, feel what he is feeling, tell me what you feel. Try to describe where you are.”

“Cold,” Kryslie said at once. “Cold, like stone – and wet. He’s hurting, like I was and I think his foot is trapped by something and he is trying to free it, but he is too weak. He’s cursing, and it’s dark.”

Kryslie had a distant look on her face.

“What else?” Reslic urged.

“I...” she didn’t want to say what she sensed, but Reslic was insistent. “It feels like he wants to die, but at the same time, he is cursing.”

Reslic asked, “Do you have a sense of where he is?”

“Small, dark, wet, confined,” Kryslie said, shaking her head. “I have no idea where he is. I have hardly seen any of the estate.”

“Wait here,” Reslic directed, rising from the chair. To Alexon he said, “I need to access the palace archives.”

“You can use my terminal, your Excellency,” Alexon offered. “In my office, over there.”

Tanya returned to Kryslie, and some instinct made her reach over and give her a hug.

“We will find him,” Tanya assured her.

Kryslie returned the hug, and after a while, she said, “I could find him, I think.”

“How?” Tanya asked, pulling away to look more closely at Kryslie.

“We are twins. I think I would know when he is close.”

“Wait here,” Tanya echoed Reslic as she went to find him. She saw Reslic studying a plan of the estate and waited politely for him to notice her, and then told him what Kryslie had said.

Alexon was hovering, and he spoke immediately, “Sir, it is not advisable to transmit Princess Kryslie yet. We advise a full day of rest.”

Reslic knew the after effects of backlash. “Go and examine her again. I am concerned enough to consider her implied offer.”

“Have you any ideas?” Tanya asked, hoping for something positive.

“Stone and water,” Reslic said. “We are scouring the grounds, but there is little rock on the estate but plenty of underground caverns. I cannot be sure that we have mapped them all. I have sent guards to search all that we know of.”

Tymos sat on the damp stone and rested from trying to free himself. He was shivering and feeling very weak. At least the painful tingling had subsided, his mind was beginning to work again, and for a time, the insidious whispers he had been hearing in his head were quiet. They weren’t his thoughts. He didn’t want to give up and die. He had important things to do.

The mental whispers came again. He wasn't important. He was only a weak, puny minded, second-rate bastard child of weak-minded missionaries.

Tymos cursed, yelling aloud, "Second rank! I'm second rank."

He and his sister were important – had to be – or they wouldn't be second rank. The mental voice suddenly changed to say, "I am coming to get you."

Tymos knew that he didn't want the person behind that mind to find him.

"I know where you are and I am coming to get you."

In a frenzy of renewed effort, Tymos tried to free his foot, but it was fastened to the rock by a metal band. He cursed, trying to remember how his captor had fastened it, but his memory was fragmented – maybe even full of hallucinations. All he had seen of his captor was a glowing man shape, who had picked him up while he was helpless and transmitted him here.

He must have blacked out for a time, Tymos decided. He didn't even know where here was.

After another frenzy of trying to get free, he sensed another mind voice...Kryslie. He concentrated on his twin, tried to talk to her, but his residual energy deserted him.

"Wake up!" Kryslie said, shaking her brother gently.

Tymos opened his eyes and felt energy filling him. "What?" He looked around and saw the half dozen guards with hand held torches, and the Reslic looking down at him.

"So, what have you been up to?" Reslic asked neutrally.

Tymos didn't know what to say.

He thought that telling the President that he hadn't trained them to fight invisible attackers would not be well received. He decided on the weak answer, "I got my foot stuck."

"We will discuss this after you have been checked over by the medics," Reslic told him. He turned to the guards, "Get him out of here."

Kryslie saw Reslic gesture her out of the way, but he didn't dismiss her.

Once Tymos was free, and guards helped him into a standing position, Reslic had the guards transmit both of Tymoros's foster children to the infirmary. Reslic followed, finding the High King waiting with Tanya.

"You found him then," Tymoros remarked calmly, as if he had not been highly agitated for the past few hours.

Kryslie went to him and nestled into him, and felt his arm around her. Alexon was leading Tymos to a bed.

"No, your daughter did, like she had a tracer on him," Reslic told his fellow Governor. "And may I suggest that you sit down, Princess Kryslie, before you fall down."

"I feel okay," Kryslie told him, forgetting the usual courtesies for talking to the Governors.

However, she decided to obey and climbed onto the bed she had used earlier.

"While Tymos is being checked over, you can tell me exactly what you remember," Reslic directed.

Kryslie let her mind recall and began, "Delia and Morov transmitted us out of the lyceum so we could walk back. Stenn came and talked to us, said he would ask if we could lunch with you, and he went off. We walked on, and then I started feeling somewhat electrified. Delia started looking around, and then she pushed me. I felt like there was someone else around and saw a glowing humanoid shape, and then I don't know much until the medics came. What did happen?"

Reslic's lips thinned, but he answered, "It seems that someone, wearing a personal force screen set for stealth, transmitted in too close to you. It caused backflow from the repellor field and disabled you all. Whoever came, took Tymos."

"But...what for? We have never done harm to anyone. We've never had time; we don't even get to see much of our few friends."

"I intend to find out. Stenn also thought he saw someone near your group before he transmitted back," Reslic told her.

“Yes, but he wasn’t there when I thought I saw the glow.”

Reslic accepted her words. He could see no reason why Stenn would want to hurt them. He might use them as an excuse to avoid the discussion he was due to have but that was all.

“Stay here,” Reslic said, and he went to speak to Tymos.

Tymoros came to Kryslie and said gently, “I am very relieved you and your brother are both well.”

“How is he?” Reslic demanded of Alexon.

“Well enough. Most of the backflow energy has dissipated. No major physical damage – in fact none at all. I would rather they rested until tomorrow and had a high energy meal.”

“Good. They can stay in Ty’s suite tonight,” Reslic decided. Then he turned to Tymos.

“Now, tell me what you recall.”

Tymos could add little else to what Kryslie had said. Reslic seemed to be interested in the ‘voice’ he seemed to hear in his head that wanted him to believe his position was helpless and to give up.

“So why didn’t you?”

It sounded like an idle question, but Tymos already knew the President didn’t ask idle questions.

“Why would I? I have never had thoughts like that before. Then the voice said it knew where I was and he was coming to get me. I really didn’t want to stay there then.”

“Who might want to hurt you?”

“I can’t think of anyone, Sir. Stenn warned us about Zacary, but we just ignore him calling us yokels, and we have stopped him teasing Sacul about being a missionary brat.”

“Zacary,” Reslic said thoughtfully. “I don’t think he could have done this. He wouldn’t normally have access to a personal force screen.”

“A what, Sir?” Tymos asked.

“Your sister thought she saw a glowing humanoid figure – about you height. I believe someone used one in stealth mode to take you away.”

“But why?” Tymos felt confused. “Did someone want to get me in trouble?”

“Quite likely,” Reslic agreed, but he didn’t specify the kind of trouble. “But their attempt backfired. I am going to insist that you and your sister stay in your father’s suite until further notice and you will have extra guards when you go out. Delia and Morov should be well enough to return to work in a day or two.”

Chapter 10 - Friendship

Stenn Reslic tried not to look self-conscious as the large uniformed guard transmitted him into the hall of the small lyceum. He saw Tymos and Kryslie arrive with their escorts and flashed them his brightest grin. When he walked over to talk to them, his escort remained where he was.

“Why are you here, Stenn,” Kryslie asked having noticed him with a guard.

“Um, my father gave me permission to put a show on for the younger kids,” he said airily. “I’m to ask Niklas to let you help me. You in?”

“I don’t know,” Tymos hedged. “We’ve missed two days...”

“Lighten up, you two,” Stenn urged, still grinning. “It’s the afternoon stuff you need most, and this show business is meant to be educational – even for you.”

“Well,” Kryslie wavered.

“Great!” Stenn took their agreement for granted. His eyes strayed to the beam in point and his grin became positively malicious.

Tymos turned and saw Zacary arrive, with a guard escort, and scowl when he saw Stenn. The bruise on Zacary’s left cheek and chin was noticeable from across the room. He also had a cut over one eye.

“How come...” Kryslie asked, stopping to eye Stenn speculatively. “You don’t have your transmitter?”

“And neither does his arrogance, Zacary?” Tymos added.

“Ah, yes. Well, being caught fighting has a few consequences,” Stenn admitted, not at all repentant.

“Why did you fight Zacary?” Tymos asked, adding facts together.

“Who said I did?” Stenn asked, trying to sound innocent.

“Hmm?” Kryslie stared at him, waiting for an answer.

“Yeah, well, two days ago, just before ... things happened, I saw Zacary flitting. That’s sort of an unauthorised term for transmitting short distances, multiple times,” Stenn told them. “So I kind of asked him about things last night, after I got off being grounded for other things, and he didn’t like my concern for his well being. Flitting is dangerous; it uses a lot of your energy reserves.”

“I will accept your altruism, but do you think he had something to do with what happened?” Kryslie asked him.

Stenn muttered, “My father doesn’t but I know the brainless cretin is sly-clever. He behaves when adults are around, and he makes sure they aren’t when he tries to bully anyone. Besides, his brother is a guard; he could have borrowed his brother’s personal force screen.”

“Surely your father would have thought of that?” Kryslie asked. Stenn shrugged.

“Here’s Niklas,” Stenn said abruptly. “I’ll ask him to let you help me.”

Stenn strode off, deliberately walking near Zacary with his grin firmly in place. He said nothing, but heard Zacary curse him under his breath, and edge away.

Tymos saw Zacary approaching and nodded to warn Kryslie.

“You have new minds I see. What did you do to the others?” Zacary asked. “And where have you been for the last two days? Confined to your rooms?”

“More or less,” Tymos agreed amicably. “It was decided that we needed more protection. How about you?”

Zacary scowled. “Didn’t Reslic tell you? It’s why he is down here. He’s in trouble for picking on me. He reckoned I caused your misbehaviour.”

“Our what?” Kryslie asked in surprise.

“You know – your brother taking off,” Zacary accused.

Kryslie glanced at her brother, and Tymos said in a quiet voice, "I wasn't running away. I was taken away, and in no condition to talk to anyone. How did you know?"

"I heard. They came to ask me if I knew where you were," Zacary claimed.

Niklas interrupted further conversation. "Tymos, Kryslie, you are to help Stenn. Zacary, I will take you in."

Stenn returned after Zacary had gone, and after requesting the help of his guard minder to fetch two chests from a storeroom.

"Kennick and Nyler have gone to fetch the stuff we need. I'd have done it myself but, well, I don't have my transmitter."

Kryslie noticed that the two guards that were escorting her and Tymos were still nearby and watchful.

"So what is this about?" Tymos wanted to know. "Obviously being sent here is a punishment, but you are not acting like it."

"It is my father's way of reminding me that if I act like a ten year old, I will be treated like one." Stenn flushed slightly. "But then he told me that perhaps you two were working too hard and there were other ways to learn history. So...I get to spend time with you two, and have a perfectly good reason to keep you away from Zacary."

"Did your father say that bit about keeping away from him?" Tymos asked.

"No, but I intend to keep an eye on that thick wit if he comes near you."

"What is it that makes you think we need all this protection?" Kryslie asked.

"Nothing much. Just that you and Tymos are Uncle Ty's only heirs," Stenn said casually. "We can't afford to lose you."

Tymos snorted softly. "We don't intend to get lost. So why is Zacary still here? Did he arrive here late like us?"

"Did he say that?" Stenn asked.

"He said he is going off world soon," Kryslie commented.

Stenn snorted. "I don't think so. They don't even trust him to go off the estate."

"Why's that?" Tymos wanted to know.

"You two really are ignoramuses aren't you?" Stenn teased with a complete lack of malice. "Zac is some kind of cousin of mine, and he's got enough power to indicate he might reach second stage, but he has only got a couple of months left to show it. If he hasn't reached it by his seventeenth birthday, he will have to start working around here. Start a career."

"Will all of the students here reach second stage?" Kryslie asked, but Stenn merely shrugged. His attention went to where the two guards were carrying one of the chests.

"Come on," he urged.

Tymos looked into the chest after Stenn had opened it. He saw pieces of painted board. "What is this stuff?"

"It is what I need for a figure box show," Stenn said, as he began to lift out the boards, and then metal pieces to join them and some rods and curtains. "Help me get this set up."

"You'd better tell us what to do," Kryslie murmured, but she quickly got the idea.

The second chest arrived, and Stenn had it placed near the wall, and went on setting up what he called 'the stage'.

"We can slip in different backgrounds behind this window bit," Stenn explained. "That's what all those pieces are that I took out first. The other chest has the stringed dolls and the puppets that fit over your hands."

The students came out for the morning break as they finished fixing the last panel in place on the stage. There were many cries of excitement and one of the younger girls came up to Stenn and clung to him. She had curly blond hair and Stenn tousled it.

"This is Jenni, my sister," he admitted as the girl's voice demanded. "What story are you doing?"

“I haven’t decided yet. I may let my friends decide. Tymos and Kryslie have not seen a figure box show before.”

“Never?” Jenni asked, wide eyed. “Why not, Prince Tymos?”

Tymos saw an odd expression on Stenn’s face and glanced where his friend was looking. Zacary was only a few feet away and his face had gone white.

Turning back quickly, Tymos said to the younger girl, grinned and said, “Too busy, I guess.”

Senna and Tory wandered up. “Why are you here, brother?” Senna asked. “Haven’t you grown up yet?” She continued on her way.

Stenn shook his head. “She’s twelve and she reckons she’s a lady. Don’t you believe it.”

“How many other siblings have you got?” Kryslie asked, but her eyes were following Zacary.

“I have four older brothers, one older and four younger sisters, and my mother is about to have another baby.”

Stenn saw Kryslie’s look of concern and he was sure it wasn’t to do with him having nine siblings. “Let him stew, Kryslie,” he advised.

“I’ll be back,” she told him.

She went first to get a cup of drink, and then to approach Zacary from the side. He was leaning back against a wall, staring at nothing.

“Have a drink,” she said gently. He went rigid and looked as if he wanted to flee.

“Why didn’t you tell me who you were?” he demanded with some of his normal arrogance.

“Why’d you make me look like an idiot? I’d thought you’d have had red hair – like your father.”

“We didn’t know that you didn’t know and we are, in a lot of ways, still pretty ignorant. And we haven’t been encouraged to think we were all that important. As for the hair, we couldn’t help that.”

Zacary pushed himself away from the wall and said, rudely, “Keep away from me, okay?”

Kryslie watched him walk off and began to return to her twin. When she saw Niklas, she detoured to him.

“Sir, I think someone needs to talk to Zacary`. He doesn’t seem well,” Kryslie suggested.

Niklas glanced around the hall, found Zacary and followed his progress for a while.

“I will. Thank you.”

The children returned to their classes, and Stenn observed, “Zacary’s minder is gone. I wonder if he’s going to return today or tomorrow.”

“He needs help,” Kryslie told Stenn.

“I’ve said that all along,” Stenn retorted. “He’s a thick wit.”

“I think he is in shock,” Kryslie tried to explain.

“So he should be if he pulled that stunt two days ago,” Stenn said.

“Leave it,” Tymos suggested soberly and Stenn stopped himself commenting further. “How about you tell us what stories you can do?”

Stenn returned his attention to the project. “Mostly folk tales. Do you know any?”

Kryslie listed several.

“When did you have time to hear them?”

“We have the youngest children in the section near our terminals. I have listened to the teacher telling stories.”

Stenn whistled. “You two are incredible. I asked my father why you were put here to learn when you were having private lessons before this. Apart from joining in the afternoon lessons, he said you could learn the ‘baby’ lessons as I called them, while you did your own work. I didn’t believe him.”

Tymos chuckled. “I guess we were at that. Anyway, what are you going to do?”

“None of the ones you have heard. My infinitely wise father suggested the one about Gemon and Allise which is usually presented as a comedy.” Stenn pulled out a small data pad

from his pocket, fiddled with the settings and held it out. "Here, read the script while I find the characters."

Kryslie read the story with Tymos looking over her shoulder. They both laughed at the end.

"I think I know why your father suggested this one," Kryslie told her friend.

"It made you laugh!"

"Yes, but there's more than that," Tymos implied.

"It has a serious moral," Stenn shrugged.

"Yes, but who is the moral for?" Kryslie asked innocently.

"The little kids of course."

"When did you last read the script?" Tymos asked.

"I know the story by heart," Stenn said derisively.

Tymos took the data pad and read, "And the mischievous Gemon lived a long life with his wife Allise and his six sons, who were all just like him."

"Why are you turning that interesting shade of red?" Kryslie asked.

"Never mind," Stenn growled. A moment later, he relented and laughed. "I walked into that one. It is my father pulling one of his jokes. I thought...I thought I had got off lightly, and to my advantage. I should have known!"

"Perhaps he needed to lighten up too?" Tymos suggested with an attempt at a straight face.

"Yes, I guess he did. Wish some of my uncles would."

He didn't explain that comment and quickly added, "I'll show you how these stringed dolls work, and you can help me do the show."

"When will that be?" Tymos asked.

"Probably tomorrow morning - I can't see them letting you slack off this afternoon. And for that, Uncle Perrin is probably going to use me as the stringed doll."

Kryslie took up one of the dolls and let Stenn show her what to do. She quickly mastered the art.

"Do you two have data pads?" Stenn asked his friends.

"No, do we need one?" Tymos asked.

"I was thinking of sending the script across, so you can learn it tonight. No matter, I can send it to your room terminals."

"We are staying in Father's suite at the moment," Kryslie told him.

Stenn exhaled. If he were being watched as closely as his friends were, he'd be going insane. "You can see if you can get it from his terminal."

"There's really no need. I can remember it," Tymos assured him.

"Me too," Kryslie agreed.

"Well...so...let's have a practice," Stenn suggested, wanting to see if they did know it after one reading.

Tymos and Kryslie arrived in the small lyceum next morning to a scene of chaos. Twice the usual number of children were there, many only just walking.

"What's all this?" Tymos murmured.

His guard explained cheerfully, "Young Stenn likes doing things like this for the little ones. They start learning history this way. My two boys could hardly sleep last night."

"Let's find Stenn," Kryslie suggested, and the guard waved her off as two little boys ran at him.

Stenn had his hands full. With one arm, he held a little girl, who looked to be about three. She was clinging around his neck and giving him sloppy kisses. A girl who looked to be about six held his other arm.

"Popular with the ladies, I see," Tymos murmured, amused.

"Yeah, well, they haven't seem me for a few nights," Stenn muttered.

Senna added her wisdom as she passed. "Because he got grounded and because he was wasting time here yesterday and had to do his work last night."

A few minutes later, a woman with light brown hair, dressed in a gown of yellow satin trimmed with bands of tiny embroidered flowers came up to them. A cloud of floral perfume travelled with her. When Kryslie turned around, she saw at once that the woman was well advanced in pregnancy.

Stenn quickly made introductions. "Ma, have you met Tymos and Kryslie?"

"Not yet, but I have heard a lot about them from Tanya. It is a pleasure. I am Seoni Reslic."

She gave them both a peck on the cheek and turned to pluck the little girl from her grip of Stenn's neck. To the other girl, she simply said, "Daisy," and the girl released Stenn and went to her mother.

"See you later, Ma," Stenn said quickly, and took the chance to escape behind the stage.

Tymos and Kryslie followed.

"Everything is ready. I came over early to set it up. The backsets are all in order. If Kryslie can help with one of the dolls, you can change the sets."

"Fine," Tymos grinned.

The audience settled quickly, with each of the classes seated in separate groups and the smallest children sitting at the front. Kryslie noticed women in lemon coloured outfits holding some of the toddlers. Stenn, seeing her looking that way, explained that all the extra people were from the nursery.

"Ready," Stenn asked. Kryslie nodded, and so did Tymos when he glanced that way.

Feeling a sense of excitement, Kryslie saw Stenn take out his data pad, and sit it in a holder within easy reach. He touched the screen and music began coming from a speaker within the stage framework. The last of the rustlings and murmurings ceased.

Stenn put on a fine wire headpiece, took a deep breath and began to narrate the story. Kryslie only had one doll to manipulate but Stenn switched between four others, telling the story and gesturing to Tymos to change the sets. He brought the story alive, and adults and children alike were entranced.

In a pause when her character of Allise was not required, Kryslie glanced through a one-way mirror at the audience and saw smiles on the faces of the teachers and the nursery staff as well. About halfway through, Kryslie noticed President Reslic, standing right at the back, near the wall, and she was sure she saw a trace of a smile on his face. She took a moment to wonder if there was more than one lesson he was trying to bring home to his son.

When the show ended, Stenn insisted on having his helpers share the applause, and grinned fiercely as many of the audience of children realised just who Tymos and Kryslie were. His friends hadn't seemed to think that being Tymos's Heir Designates was anything extraordinary – or that they really deserved the special guarding, or the deference of the servants.

Well, it was about time they learnt how important they were to everyone on the estate.

Stenn slipped away while his friends were busy, and found his father beside him.

"Well done," Reslic murmured, praising his son's performance. "Bring your friends back with you this evening. I need a word with the three of you."

"I'll do that," Stenn agreed, and his father moved away.

He was still exuberant, as he set about packing up the stage, after all the children had gone. Tymos began to help, but Niklas came and fetched him. Stenn gave him a shrug.

After lessons, Stenn arrived in his father's suite ahead of his friends and had time to take in the sight of all three Governors talking together in the main room of the suite. Since none of them were wearing their formal robes, but were in fact dressed casually, he relaxed. They were not here to give him 'the chat' about training for a career. His guilty conscience tucked itself

away as he hurried into his room to wash up. When he returned to the main room, little Jenni was hanging on to Kryslie, who didn't seem annoyed by her, and Senna was trying to flirt with Tymos, but he was looking faintly alarmed. Still, he didn't have to tolerate it long. Stenn caught the look in his father's eye that meant 'come on' and went to direct his friends into his father's private sanctum.

Stenn deliberately chose to sit next to Tymos on the long couch. That way he shared the regard of the three Governors with two who were not currently in his father's bad graces.

Tymoros spoke first. "I am hoping, Stenn, that you might agree to act as a mentor to Tymos and Kryslie."

"Ah, of course," Stenn agreed, and saw his father smile faintly before returning to serious. "I'd be honoured."

Tymoros nodded and turned his attention to Reslic. Xyron sat and observed the three children.

Reslic spoke then. "I would like to get impressions from each of you about young Zacary. You may speak freely, but I want you to be scrupulously fair."

Stenn, who knew Zacary best, spoke first.

"Well, you know he and I don't like each other," he admitted right away. He went on to itemise his reasons, but admitting at times the friction between them was also his fault.

Tymos merely mentioned, "He wasn't being too bad to us, a bit arrogant and superior, and we were ignorant of a lot of things."

Kryslie expressed her agreement. "He didn't know who we were and we didn't think it should matter. We were meant to be learning, not acting important."

"Indeed," Reslic agreed. "What happened yesterday?"

"Jenni called me by my title," Tymos admitted.

Kryslie went on, "Zacary suddenly looked ill. I went to talk to him, and apparently, he resented us fooling him and not saying who we were. He told me to stay away from him."

Xyron finally spoke up, "Zacary's attitude has been an issue for some time, but from what the three of you have told us, I think it was more thoughtless than malicious."

Kryslie spoke thoughtfully, "I think he resented being left behind, and still being in the small lyceum."

Reslic asked her, "What do you think might help him?"

She spoke what she had been thinking. "I don't think he is stupid or unintelligent. I think he needs to do something where he has some responsibility and is able to use his own judgement."

"Even if it is putting you and your brother in danger?" Reslic asked, his voice sharp.

Three sets of eyes stared at Reslic, and Stenn blurted, "He had no reason to want to..."

"Stenn, if he was feeling frustrated then having us come in and look like we would pass him too – he might have wanted to cause trouble," Tymos proposed.

"Trouble, yes. But he left you for dead!" Stenn retorted.

"He probably wasn't thinking clearly," Kryslie said softly.

"He believes he was hearing voices in his head," Xyron inserted into the conversation. "Voices that told him how to work out his frustration."

"Like I thought I was hearing," Tymos said, feeling pale.

"But you did not do what they said," Xyron observed.

"No, but if he wasn't thinking clearly... Will he be all right?"

"What you have all said, will enable us to help him," Xyron assured them. He rose and said, "I'll be going." His attendant appeared as if summoned.

Tymoros followed his example, and stood up, but he waited while Stenn had a hurried conversation with Tymos.

"I thought it was too good to be true that I could have guests when I am grounded. I will try to see you at lunch tomorrow – but I am back at my normal studies and still grounded."

Tymos thumped him on the shoulder. "Whose fault is that?"

Stenn grinned.

Chapter 11 - Progress

Later, after they had eaten and when their foster father didn't seem to have duties elsewhere, Kryslie decided to ask some questions that puzzled her.

"Father? Stenn implied that not all Royal Children reach second stage – and I assume that when they do they study in the large lyceum. What happens to those that don't?"

Tymoros turned his attention to her question.

"You are still concerned about young Zacary?"

Kryslie nodded.

"Are you aware that the power you have is inherited by each generation of Royal Governors?"

Kryslie nodded again, and Tymoros went on, "It is strongest in those who are in the direct line of descent. Apart from the Governors, those who are second rank have or will have the most power. Often though, the younger children in the Governors' families will be less powerful than their elder siblings. It is not, however, a hard and fast rule."

"Stenn said Zacary was some kind of cousin," Tymos prompted.

"Yes," Tymoros agreed. "But you could say that everyone on the estate is related in some degree. Zacary's parents were missionaries and minor members of Jono's family. Those who are furthest from the direct line often only develop to the first stage. Again, there can be exceptions."

"So what do those people do?" Kryslie asked.

"They are educated to as far as they can go, or want to go, and then trained to perform supportive tasks on the estate – attendants, security personnel, technicians, missionaries and so on down to cooks and other domestic staff. Zacary has been encouraged to choose an area of service to train for. We believed that he might have reached second stage, though perhaps not going as far as level delta."

Kryslie queried the term.

"The levels in the large lyceum start at level theta, and go up to level alpha," Tymoros explained.

Kryslie sensed there was more to the concept of level delta, but another realisation caused her to blurt,

"So everyone on the estate has some of this power?"

Tymoros met the eyes of his consort, and murmured, "There are some notable commoners here." He went on, "Of those who reach second stage, relatively few reach level alpha. All go as far as they can in education, and can train for senior support positions. Those who reach level alpha will eventually become Elders."

"I assume, by definition, commoners have no trace of our power," Tymos requested clarification. "Do all Royals, only marry Royals?"

"Yes to the first question, no to the second," Tymoros told him.

"Tanya said she was common born," Kryslie reminded her twin. "So, when Royals marry common, the children can receive Royal power?"

Tymoros nodded. "We do not forbid such alliances – but we do have the children monitored. If they have inherited enough power, they come here to be educated, and trained. Mostly they never go past first stage. Some go on to become scholars in the city or achieve high rank amongst the common people."

"Then what about us?" Tymos asked. "We weren't even born here. Do all the children of missionaries come here?"

“No, only those who are likely to reach second stage,” Tymoros said carefully. “And that is when both parents are Tymorean.”

“So...Tymoreans can marry people of other worlds?” Kryslie asked. “But people on other worlds can’t all be like us.”

“Indeed not, and producing children is not always possible. When children are conceived from mixed origins, they do not inherit our power, only our intelligence and stamina.”

Tymoros noticed that both Tymos and Kryslie seemed to be distracted, as if trying to comprehend vast vistas of knowledge. He decided to draw their attention back to just one world. “Is there some matter worrying you?”

“Why are we different?” Tymos asked, returning his focus to his foster father. “We came from Earth, we know that. Were our parents missionaries?”

“No,” Tymoros admitted softly. He did not want to say too much, or have them recall too much of their past. “You are of Tymorean descent and human and both of you are exceptions to the rule that crossbreeds do not inherit our power.”

“But why?” Kryslie asked, coming to sit nearer her foster father, on the arm of his chair. “What possible reason is there for us?”

“And how?” Tymos added.

Again, Tymoros considered his thoughts before answering. “The Elders foretold your birth, and your potential, but have not yet seen the reason for it. They have foreseen that you will have a mission on Earth, but not for many years yet.”

He omitted to mention the sense shared by many Elders, of some still clouded danger for his own world, and that his children would be vital to preventing that danger.

“If we were born so far away, how did you find us?” Kryslie asked.

“We have had missionaries on Earth for many years. Do you recall Vincent? He knew what to look for. As for why you are different – I see the hand of the Guardians of Peace in your creation, even if I do not know the reason.”

“I remember you saying that our power comes from them,” Tymos said slowly. “I wonder why they chose Tymoreans to have it.”

Tymoros leant back and spoke reflectively. “Much of our very early history is buried in time. Only the most important facts have been remembered and preserved.”

He felt a stirring of ancient memories in his mind and recalled when he had become High King. All the ancient memories, from all his forebears, had become accessible to him.

“The Guardians of Peace revealed themselves to the first Governors – an alliance of three powerful men who had joined forces to bring peace to this world. They gave those men this power and a trust to maintain peace everywhere. They made our planet a guardian planet. For a thousand years, there was peace, but a time came when there was unrest, uprisings, and friction between many of the ethnic groups. We had by then, begun to spread the message of peace to other worlds, and seek new ones. At that time it was noticed that there was unrest on all the other worlds where Tymoreans had gone.”

Both Tymos and Kryslie were completely intent on what he was saying.

“The Guardians of Peace sent enlightenment to the Elders of the time, as well as sending three men who became known as Great Ones. They helped bring peace here again, and when they finished, they went out into the universe. It became understood, that when there was peace here, there would be peace in the universe.”

“And it has been peaceful since?” Kryslie asked.

Tymoros shook his head. “Nowhere is perfect. Even here, our history reveals many periods of unrest, when genetic mutations occurred and ethnic divisions became rife.”

“Mutations?” Tymos queried.

“What causes them?” Kryslie asked.

“The power we have is a two edged sword,” Tymoros admitted. “In those who originally received it – the power was safe, stable. Their descendents react positively to it, for the most part. Some of our original ethnic groups did not – they reacted negatively, and the mutations began. Some of these were apparent but others were subtle. Over time, the power destroyed all traces of the genetic origin of the people, in all but the Royal lines. However, the power also restored the people to a stable form – the most stable for millennia. Now, amongst the commoners there are no more ethnic divisions. And we, the Governors, have over the centuries, taken our consorts from amongst the common people, to minimise divisions between commoners and Royalty.”

Tymoros watched as his children thought over what he had said. He could not decide exactly what they were considering, but their next questions surprised him with their innate intuition.

“Does a negative reaction only create mutations?” Tymos asked.

“Or is it to create a mental state that goes against the idea of peace and equality?” Kryslie added.

“It is both,” Tymoros told them. “That is why we train our children so carefully.”

“How though, would one with power cause a negative reaction?” Tymos asked. “Like when the early Governors affected people?”

“It is something that happens, and even now we cannot say what stimulates a negative reaction,” Tymoros told them.

“Could this have happened to people on Earth? People who contacted us?” Kryslie asked abruptly.

Tymoros tensed, like feeling the shiver of a premonition.

“As I said, we have had missionaries on Earth for many years. The human genome has a naturally neutral reaction to our power. You and Tymos were not the result of our power affecting you.”

Tymos murmured, “Who are the Guardians of Peace that granted Tymoreans this power, the ones who you think helped create us?”

“We only know of them as a race of very powerful, very wise beings of the utmost integrity,” Tymoros explained. “In both of you, they gave me a gift beyond price.”

As he hoped, Kryslie and Tymos were distracted from thinking on the highly philosophical matters that bordered on religious faith. They each came closer and gave him an embrace to reassure him of their commitment to and affection for him.

“Such things are for times when we can meditate on them. What ever is in your future will wait. For now, what is of supreme importance is for you to be ready for second stage.”

With quiet voices of acknowledgement, Tymos and Kryslie left their father to his own thoughts. They made their goodnights to Tanya, who had stayed quiet listening and stitching tiny flowers around the edge of a small white blanket, and separated to go to their temporary rooms in the suite.

For the next week, even though Delia and Morov were back attending them, Tymos and Kryslie continued to have a personal security guard transmit them to classes. Although this made it seem to some that they were ‘grounded’ – they knew it was for their protection even if not knowing what ‘danger’ might affect them. They did not want to act without thought and be the cause of more worry for their foster father.

On their arrival on that particular day, when they were expecting their normal routine, they arrived in the small lyceum to see Xyron waiting near a small table, and speaking to the children as they bowed and passed.

His attendant, standing nearby, spotted their arrival and moved out to look at them. His slight bow in their direction was as clear as an invitation. Xyron was waiting for them.

Their casual stance became formal, and the recent lessons in the rules of etiquette from Nolan, their tutor of the past five evenings, came to mind, and were almost instinctive now.

They were wearing casual, loose fitting clothes, but now they walked like they were wearing their formal outfits.

No matter how little they felt they deserved their rank as Heir Designates, it was expected that they would be respectful towards their elders and respectful of those who looked up to them. They were expected to present themselves properly – always calm, always dignified except when relaxing privately. On his first day as their tutor, Nolan had not spared his comments in pointing out their deficiencies, phrased as, “Stubbornly bordering on the edge of respect and in danger of falling into a pit of disrespect.”

Tymos and Kryslie had changed their walk to a controlled stride, and to a discerning eye, they were perfectly in step with each other as they stopped two paces from Governor Xyron and bowed properly.

Xyron chose not to be extremely formal, and smiled in approval. “It is good to see you both behaving in a civilised manner, befitting your rank,” he remarked.

He observed the faint flush on both faces. “I have advised Niklas not to expect you immediately as I have a duty for you to perform.”

Tymos and Kryslie both had the same sense of mingled curiosity and excitement, and firmly resisted glancing at each other to confirm it.

“Sir, we aren’t dressed for an official duty,” Tymos apologised.

“Yes, so I suggest that you rectify that deficiency and return before half past the hour. Go on!” Xyron’s voice was stern but his eyes twinkled.

Tymos and Kryslie bowed in unison, and turned to return to direct their escorts, walking in the controlled stride.

Their attendants had their formal clothes ready when they returned to their temporary rooms, and efficiently helped them change, fixed their hair, added the crystal pendants given to them at their coming out, and led them back out into the main room of the suite.

The assembly room was deserted when they returned, feeling a little self-conscious. They checked the time display on the wall and decided they should wait there until Xyron returned. It was not a long wait, he materialised with his attendant after using the time to visit all the classes again in his role as coordinator of education. He returned to the table to where a wooden box now sat, and took two smaller alloy boxes from it.

“Come,” he directed. He looked with approval as they walked, stopped at the correct distance away, bowed in the correct degree, and stood straight with hands clasped behind them.

“Relax for now,” he invited. “I will have you presenting transmitters to the new class of youngsters. I believe that having you here for this will emphasise the importance of today.”

Tymos thought to himself, “Now we are no longer hidden away.”

He saw Kryslie flash a look at him and seemed to hear, “Making use of our new notoriety.”

They returned their attention to Xyron to hear him saying, “...and because you have recently learned to use a transmitter yourselves, you will be able to impress on the youngsters the responsibility they have been given.”

Xyron gestured them closer, and took a device out of each of the alloy boxes. He handed one to Tymos and the other to Kryslie.

“I know I don’t have to advise you to use them carefully, but I will stress that they have been calibrated for you, and should not be used by anyone else.”

“Is there a particular reason, Sir?” Tymos asked, as he took a belt of gold fabric covered leather from Xyron.

“Yes, but you can worry about the theory behind the transmitters when you move up to the large lyceum,” Xyron told them. “They are designed to hook onto a belt.”

Xyron waited for them to attach the device and secure the belt before continuing. He took another device out of each of the boxes. Neither Tymos nor Kryslie had seen anything like them.

“You won’t have seen them before,” Xyron confirmed. “That is because my eldest children and those of Jono are all out and about and seldom on the estate. The younger ones have a less sophisticated device – smaller and more discreet. As you are both heir designates of Governor Tymoros, you are required to wear a personal bio-monitor. It hasn’t been essential until now, since you have been constantly accompanied by attendants or guards when you have moved around.”

“Baby sat,” Tymos translated in his mind.

Kryslie glanced down to hide her grin of agreement.

“No doubt, you would soon find a continuation of that somewhat onerous,” Xyron said dryly. “These monitors are not meant to be an intrusion of your privacy, or a means to constantly check on your private movements – though obviously they could be used that way. It is so that your physical condition and position can be determined. If you consider the events of last week, perhaps you will feel less uncomfortable with the idea. They are to be kept on you or near you at all times.”

“Yes, Sir,” Tymos and Kryslie spoke in unison.

“The difference between these and what the younger children of the Governors wear is the inclusion of a simple communications signal array.

Xyron held one up to show them. It was a thin metal box, about the width of a hand, with a row of multi coloured lights along the top, and on the outward side, a sensor pad and a press switch.

“When you are required for an official reason, one of the lights will flash. If I require your presence, the yellow light will flash. Blue means a summons from your father, and purple is for the president.” Xyron saw nods and continued. “As heir designates for the Governorship of Tymorea, you will soon be expected to attend general conferences. For this, a green light will flash and you will need to go to the Conference room. I will mention to you now, that you will also be required to attend when matters concerning the planet Earth are discussed.”

“Father said we would have a mission there,” Tymos recalled. “Is that why we must attend them?”

Xyron nodded. “Now, pay attention – the most important signals are orange and red. The orange light is accompanied by a low buzz and it means you are to be alert for danger. The red light and a shrill buzz means you are in immediate physical danger. On hearing that, you must immediately transmit to your apartment and raise the anti transmission shield. Do not even try to look for the danger; you may not have even that much time.”

Again, Xyron saw the nods and the sober faces.

“Finally, if you find yourself in a position of grave peril – pressing the button will summon immediate assistance. Do I need to go through all that again?”

“No, Sir. We will remember,” Tymos said. His voice chose that moment to break, and the last word was more of a squeak.

Xyron smiled slightly. “All summonses must be answered immediately.”

Chapter 12 - Newcomers

Niklas found his two students helping to settle the new class.

He spoke quietly, summoning them back to their own work. He added, "You would have been back sooner if Governor Xyron had not been called away."

Tymos glanced down at his formal attire.

"No, you don't need to go back and change right now. I have set a test for you - geography. Get to it."

Niklas went to sit at his desk and from there watched his two students start work. His eyes slid along to Tobias, who was well on his way to knowing all that was available about plants and horticulture. He was perfectly content with the fact that he was unlikely to reach second stage.

After a while, Niklas went to observe the new class as they started to learn to write. All were concentrating diligently and probably still in awe of having Prince Tymos and Princess Kryslie urging them to work hard. He turned back to check on his own students just as a series of quiet beeps began, alerting him to a message.

Niklas listened to the message on his communicator, and glanced over at his students. He could see the light flashing on their monitors, but they were obliviously concentrating on their tests. He went up to them.

"Save your work," he told them. They both looked surprised and glanced at each other. He was getting used to those glances and they made it seem like they were talking to each other.

"Oh," Kryslie exclaimed suddenly, seeing the green light flashing on her brother's monitor.

"I don't believe you have forgotten what that summons means," Niklas said dryly. "The Governors are busy men and they have been waiting five minutes already."

He smiled to himself after the two students had trotted to the beam in point and transmitted themselves away. They were a pleasure to teach and had shown none of the unpleasant behaviour Vincent had mentioned. Probably, they had simply needed some basic training, but Xyron had warned him that they had a great deal of potential, and it was still increasing.

That was part of the reason he was their tutor. He was prepared for the possibility that they would erupt into second stage, but was fervently hoping that Perrin Reslic was keeping their preparation and training ahead of their power level.

What he did find unsettling, was the fact that these human-Tymorean hybrids were subtly mutating. Xyron had confided that the human part of them was receding and the Tymorean genome was becoming dominant. However, since they now had transmitters, perhaps the changes were complete. All he had noticed of the change was the increasing amount of red in their hair.

He went to the terminals and checked what they had done on the tests. More than he expected and every question perfectly correct. He smiled, because what he saw proved his own theory of what one of them learnt, the other knew too. When teaching them for this topic, he had set them different subjects to research and for the test, he had deliberately switched the questions so that Kryslie was answering questions on the topic that Tymos had studied and vice-versa.

Tymos and Kryslie arrived in the Conference Room and moved to look around. They became the focus of attention of all three intent gazes. They covered their faint flushes of guilt at being tardy, by bowing in perfect unison to the seated Governors. When they straightened, they had their expressions under control.

Tymoros gestured to two vacant chairs. "Join us," he directed curtly.

"You do, I trust, understand the definition of 'immediately'," Jono Reslic commented as they sat in the indicated places. "Was there an excellent reason for your delay?"

The thought of claiming to be in the middle of a test occurred to both of them, but was immediately suppressed by the knowledge that a summons from the Governor's would always have priority. Neither thought that not paying attention to their communicator would be a good excuse.

"No Sir, we had our minds elsewhere," Tymos admitted.

"I will have your monitors adjusted to beep when you have a message," Xyron commented.

"Thank you, Sir," Tymos said meekly. He decided not to ask why they had been called, but to wait for his elders to speak.

Tymoros did. "Vincent has returned here with two more humans from Earth that have inherited some of our power." He saw he had the instant attention of his children but they waited for him to continue. "You won't be able to talk to them yet, since they are both experiencing extreme reactions to the onset of second stage. We have agreed that you should observe them so that you can be prepared for the worst type of transition."

Tymos glanced at Kryslie.

"You have questions, Prince Tymos?" Reslic suggested.

"Yes, Sir. Father told us that such a reaction in humans was unexpected. Are they Tymorean descendents, or human?"

"My brother should have a report soon," Xyron answered. "It makes no difference – they will need training. Come with me now, and I will have your lunch sent to the observation room."

Tymos and Kryslie sat by themselves, looking down into the laboratory where Xyron was tending to the two young men, strapped to the diagnostic couches. From comments he spoke aloud for their benefit, they knew that the sedated men would remain asleep until their initial symptoms of transition sickness eased. So far, there had been little to see.

When he finished eating, Tymos put his lunch tray on the seat beside him and commented. "It is a relief not to be watched all the time, isn't it?"

"And a relief not to need to advertise when you need to relieve yourself," Kryslie agreed after finishing off her drink.

They returned their attention to the room below until a vague sense of pressure made Tymos stand up. Kryslie shoved aside her tray and copied him as Reslic and Tymoros transmitted into the room. Both bowed in unison.

Reslic gave them a nod and Tymoros merely said, "Relax," and turned his attention to the scene below.

Kryslie looked down again and saw that Vincent had joined Xyron and they were each doing hands on examinations of the patients. She also noticed that both men were spasmodically twitching.

After a further half an hour, Xyron transmitted up to the observation room.

"We have completed our tests, but now must analyse the findings. Vincent will monitor them until they have stabilised after their journey. They should not wake for several more hours."

He turned to the quietly attentive, Tymos and Kryslie. "You may return here after your lessons to observe their condition."

"Father, when they wake up can we talk to them?" Tymos asked.

Neither Tymos nor Kryslie were prepared for the Governors to converse amongst themselves in a dialect that they had never heard before.

Finally, Tymoros answered his son's question.

"They are at a difficult stage. It will be several days before it will be safe for you to approach them. They must first become aware of their new power and we must have some time to sleep-teach them our language."

Xyron explained, "It will be some time before they can mingle with the Royal Children. We will need your assistance to help them acclimatise and to orientate themselves to their new surroundings as you both have had the experience of changing worlds."

"We understand," Kryslie answered for herself and Tymos.

Reslic turned from watching the newcomers and said, "It is almost time for your afternoon lessons. You will just have time to change. I expect you to be there when I arrive."

Tymos and Kryslie accepted the dismissal and the subtle warning. His Excellency, as they well knew, did not tolerate lateness. He had let them off with a mild reprimand earlier, but if he was replacing his brother today, they did not want another lapse.

Following the afternoon drill, during which it seemed that Reslic was pushing them harder than their younger classmates, they returned to the glass fronted observation room. Neither Xyron, nor Vincent, were visible in the laboratory where the patients were sleeping.

The two young men were starting to stir and the spasms they had noticed before were increasing in intensity. The restraints were still holding them onto the mattresses that were now near floor level. A particularly violent spasm shook both men and they seemed to wake. In turn, each tried to sit up, and fell back onto the mattress, defeated by the restraints. Xyron materialized into the laboratory out of sight of the two men and adjusted a dial. Vincent arrived in the observation room and commented to Tymos and Kryslie that the gravity in the chamber was now reduced to Earth normal.

The men in the room tried to sit up again, noticed the restraints and found they were not strong enough to hold against their determination to be up. Once sitting, the men became aware of each other.

"Hello," one said instinctively. The other nodded an acknowledgement.

"I'm Keith Rasmussen," the first spoke again.

"John Goss," the second responded absently. He was staring thoughtfully around.

Keith suddenly had a violent shivering fit. John stood up from the mattress and walked unsteadily towards a bank of instruments. He walked into the invisible barrier and then appeared to walk in a circle as he tested the limits of the "room". He walked back to the mattress and examined the broken restraints. They had been of some kind of metal reinforced fabric and they had parted like butter. He collapsed missing the mattress altogether.

Keith, when the shivers had abated, stood slowly and walked to examine the various objects within their limited area. He lifted a heavy looking bar and found it actually weighed very little. He found himself gripping it tightly as a wave of nausea and giddiness overcame him. When the sensation passed, he noticed that the bar had become distorted and fingertip sized dents were imprinted in the metal. His eyes met those of John who silently picked up a wooden block that crumbled in his touch. Keith tried to pick up the same type of thing with the same result.

"Is this some kind of joke?" Keith asked aloud.

"I don't think so," John replied.

"Hey, watch it!" Keith had to duck quickly to avoid John's arms that flew out and nearly hit him. For a few moments, John was unable to control his movements.

"Sorry," he apologized as soon as he could form the words. "This has happened to me before. I was tidying the storeroom and knocked a whole lot of glass stuff onto the floor. Later I went to pick up my boss and crashed the van. Last thing I remember is him holding me down and giving me an injection."

"Last thing I remember," Keith said thoughtfully, "I was at school. It was after lessons had finished for the day and I had been helping to pack up the sports stuff because I wasn't looking forward to going home. I don't remember how the fight started but I was suddenly having a go at my two best friends. Some teachers pulled us apart, gave us a verbal ear bashing about proper behaviour for senior students and threatened that I would not be school captain, if it happened again. They took us up to the office to see the headmaster of course. He's a decent sort. He

pushed me into a chair, listened to by friends saying I had just started hitting out and they were trying to calm me down. He dismissed the others with a warning and asked me to stay behind. He looked at my hands. They were purple, like they are now, and he nodded and said he would take me to a doctor friend of his.”

The voices of the patients seemed harsh compared to the soft accents of the Tymoreans. They carried clearly to the observers.

“They appear to have great strength and no control,” Tymos remarked.

“Yes, at the second stage all your abilities will increase. What you are observing is an extreme reaction. These people have had no training at all and no knowledge of what is happening. Once their power level stabilizes, my brother will control their power, like he did for you, until they have the basics of control,” Vincent explained and continued. “We have enabled them to accept the strange things that have been happening and as their training progresses their memories of Earth will diminish.”

The following week, before their afternoon lesson, Tymos and Kryslie approached John and Keith who were sitting with their attendants in the gardens. The two young men had changed subtly. Outwardly, they now wore clothes similar to their own, but purple with silver trim, indicative of a position in Xyron’s house. Their voices had softened and they were much calmer. Intuitively the twins recognized the controlling influence but made no mention of it. Two of the brown-uniformed security force watched from nearby.

“Welcome,” Kryslie greeted with a smile holding out a hand to each of them then sitting down in front of them. Tymos squatted beside his sister. John and Keith could both sit up unaided so they were already partly acclimatized.

“Cindy!” Keith returned the greeting with warmth. “Tim! It’s good to see you both.”

“You know us?” Tymos frowned it was part question, part statement. He studied the speaker.

“Certainly!” Keith assured him. “I know you from school!”

At the lack of comprehension on Tymos’s face, Keith began to sound confused. “You left school a couple of months before I was brought here! Wherever here is?”

“We are on Tymorea,” Kryslie said softly. “They brought us here from Earth because we have some of the power the Governors of this planet have, so do each of you. We are training to use it. We don’t remember our life on Earth now.”

“Yes, now I remember you,” John added. “My boss brought you from your school after some trouble there. He said he was taking you somewhere to recover. Come to think of it – our keeper looks like my Boss!”

“I don’t know exactly how long we’ve been here,” Tymos admitted. “Have they told you anything?”

“No,” John sounded aggrieved. “We have been kept in a glass walled room like two prize scientific experiments. Twice I saw my old Boss but he never came near enough to talk to. The others speak to us but we don’t understand them.”

“What colour did the others wear?” asked Tymos.

“Silver and gold,” Keith answered. “Why do we seem to be prisoners?” He glanced at the security men over his shoulder, and at the ones that had accompanied the twins.

“You are not prisoners,” Tymos assured them quickly. “And the attendants are only there to assist you and to help you acclimatize. The gravity is a bit higher here than you are used to.” Tymos did not choose to distinguish between the attendants and the security men. “When you are more used to the gravity, they will be able to start your training.”

“What kind of training?” John asked, becoming intent on her answer.

“The training to control the Royal Power that you have received,” Tymos reiterated. “It was necessary to come here because on Earth, untrained it would have destroyed you.”

Keith nodded slowly beginning to understand. He knew how the twins had been before they disappeared from school. He guessed now what had caused their problem and had probably caused his own.

“Royal Power?” Keith queried, “What does that make us?”

“You are to be fostered by Professor Governor Xyron,” Kryslie explained, indicating the trim on their uniforms.

“Why must I be fostered?” John asked pointedly. “I am twenty-three years old. I am not a child!”

“In terms of your development you are. We were told that the power usually develops in early adolescence. The Royal Children are trained from a very young age to be ready for it. We got it late. The Royal Governors, the ones who wear silver and gold, are taking an exceptional interest in each of us. They sent us here to help you, so... how do you feel?”

“Great,” both John and Keith agreed. “Except for the strange surroundings, that is,” John added pointedly.

Tymos shrugged as he stood up. “We have some exercises to show you.”

Kryslie stood and helped Keith to stand. Tymos gave John his hand.

They began with some simple warm up exercises and progressed to a slow walk. Even that tired the two newcomers.

“I feel like I’ve been sick for months,” Keith complained. “I am feeling shaky already.”

“Soon you’ll be doing this!” Tymos assured them and followed his words with a perfectly executed double forward roll along the ground. Keith actually laughed as Tymos sprang back up to his feet.

“What was wrong with that?” Tymos demanded.

Keith stopped laughing to explain.

“I saw you try that once at school. You landed flat on your back in the mud!”

“That was well done,” John admitted, impressed. “Let me try.”

His first effort was very bad. His legs and arms went in all directions. The second try, Tymos helped his body curve into an arc and the result was better.

With help, John repeated the manoeuvre several times before he tried it again on his own and succeeded. Not to be out done, Keith took a turn with Kryslie assisting him. He too eventually performed creditably.

John, sitting back on the ground, watched closely and noticed the casual ease with which the slightly built Kryslie hefted Keith who was taller and more solid. It made him thoughtful

The attendants assigned to the newcomers spoke softly to their charges but although they guessed, it was time to go; neither Keith nor John really understood them.

Tymos confirmed their guess “It is time for you to rest again.”

“Back to our glass cage,” John growled. “I want to get out of there. I am sure they keep us sleeping for longer than we need.”

“Don’t fight the sleep tapes then,” Kryslie commented. “They are trying to teach you the language.”

Then Kryslie stopped. She had been speaking in Tymorean. They had understood her. Why couldn’t they understand any one else?

Tymos and Kryslie did not watch their friends leave. Their own attendants reminded them that they must return to their own schedule. The afternoon was only half over.

The next few afternoons were repeats of that day. First thing in the afternoon, Tymos and Kryslie received new exercises for John and Keith along with instructions for doing them. After the first time, an optional challenge was included. When the newcomers were finished, Tymos and Kryslie returned to their own exercises and expected to work twice as hard to complete the routine devised to challenge them.

Chapter 13 - Second Stage

John and Keith materialised in the now familiar clearing with a feeling of intense satisfaction. Learning to use the Tymorean personal transmitters had confirmed in their minds that were not 'jumped up commoners' as some of the servants had claimed. This first transmission, using their own power, made that power real to them.

Moments later, some of the elation waned as Rowan, their instructor, took the transmitters back, set a time for their next lesson and departed.

"Oh well," Keith sighed. "We will have one eventually." He looked around to see if Tim and Cindy were coming. Then he told himself firmly, "Tymos...and Kryslie." The names were not too different, but the two kids were, and they were calling one of the Governors 'father'. Keith and John were allowed to call Governor Xyron 'foster-father', and for the first time he could remember, the term didn't raise a feeling of trepidation.

John nudged Keith and said, "Here they come."

Tymos and Kryslie trotted into the clearing. Their faces were flushed from exercise, but they were not out of breath. They each grinned a greeting as two security men appeared trotting after them. These guards took up a position opposite the two guards already present.

"Why didn't you just transmit here?" Keith asked. "Would have been quicker."

"Quicker, yes, but Perrin Reslic would be at us if we did. He likes to keep reminding us that we had legs before transmitters and it is no shame to use them."

Tymos grinned even wider and said, "Which doesn't explain why our attendants transmitted us everywhere before we received our own devices...and still often do. Anyway, are you ready to do some work?"

"We've been working," Keith retorted. "Non stop lessons. So I really need to work off some energy."

"So do I," John agreed. "I thought I had well and truly finished with school, but I am not complaining. I'm learning fascinating new things and at least we are out of that glass cage."

"So, where have they put you now?" Kryslie asked.

"Infirmary," John told her, gesturing over his shoulder at the low building just showing above the trees. He saw both Tymos and Kryslie looking there as if the information was new to them.

"Got some tricky exercises for you today," Tymos told his friends. "If you do okay, and you aren't too tired, we are allowed to show you around a bit."

"I thought the idea was to tire us out," Keith challenged with a grin.

Kryslie shrugged. "The effect will depend on how acclimatised you are. It took us a while before we didn't collapse at the end of our lessons."

The thought of having a look around their new world, even if only a part of the huge Royal Estate, gave John and Keith an energy boost. They worked through the exercises and needed very little help from their friends once either Tymos or Kryslie had demonstrated what to do.

At the end, they were sweating and panting and more than grateful to the attendants who had brought a drink for them.

"What's this," Keith asked, eying the green liquid.

"A restorative," Tymos explained. "It will restore your energy levels...unless of course, you don't want to look around."

For an answer, Keith drank the liquid quickly and found it tasted delicious. "Aren't you having any?"

"We did," Kryslie admitted. "Our attendants had some ready when Perrin finished making us lift weights."

“Where are we going?” John asked.

Tymos drew out an electronic data pad from his pocket. Morov had thoughtfully provided it after hearing the plans for this late afternoon activity. “Just around,” he said unhelpfully. After scanning the data pad and memorising what was on the screen, he handed the unit to Kryslie. She took a quick look, and then handed it to John. However, in that look, she too had memorised the map of the Royal Estate, and located their current position.

Kryslie gave her twin a grin. This would be the first time that they had been allowed to wander around the palace grounds. So far, they had only been allowed to travel from the small lyceum to their father’s palace, or too the clearing where they met John and Keith. There were a lot more places that they had only ever transmitted to and from.

“Come on,” Kryslie grabbed Keith’s arm and pulled him into motion. “You know where the infirmary is, so we won’t go that there. This way.”

She began to pull him in the direction from which they had arrived. The guards started to follow, but the two attendants didn’t.

John took a moment to look around before starting of after her. “What is that long tall building along from the infirmary?”

Without a pause, Kryslie told him, “Personnel quarters. The people who work on the estate, sleep there.”

“Or in another building on the other side of the estate,” Tymos added.

The group walked in amongst a thicket of screening trees, to emerge into view of a more ordered area. There was an avenue of ornamental trees in individual plots, growing between raised flowerbeds abloom with all colours of flowers.

Keith paused to enjoy the sight, and John looked carefully around as if to memorise it.

“On your left,” Tymos announced, portentously, “Is Governor Xyron’s palace. On the right is the small lyceum where they have us taking lessons with the babies.”

That got Keith’s attention “What ever for?”

Tymos merely grinned, allowing his sister to explain, “In the words of a few of our friends, it is because we haven’t grown up yet.” She didn’t explain further, knowing that her twin was pausing for the effect of her words to register, before answering. Finally, he did.

“We haven’t reached second stage yet,” he shrugged. “When we do, we will graduate to the large lyceum. That is where you will probably be once you know the basics of reading and writing Tymorean. We should be able to show you that.”

“Up ahead is our father’s palace,” Kryslie said pointing, before taking her friends through the gap between there and Xyron’s palace. Several servants passed them, going the other way. Each bowed to Tymos and Kryslie and kept going.

“Wow,” Keith exclaimed as they emerged into a large open area, the centre of which was paved with a huge mosaic.

John was studying the trees in pots circling the area; they were different again to the trees near the small lyceum. And what he had at first thought were more of the raised flower beds, were also mini mazes of different flowers. The colours forming symbols on a contrasting colour background.

“This is the Palace Garden,” Kryslie told her friends. She was as impressed by the scene as her friends.

“When they have functions to which commoners are invited, they hold them out here, or in the Grand Ballroom of Father’s palace,” Tymos said. His mind recalled a carriage ride around this garden, but that had been at night and the area had been lit by a multitude of tiny lights strung from tree to tree and other portable lights.

They four of them stopped in the centre of the garden and looked around. Their unobtrusive guards were still nearby and ever watchful.

They were in a position to look down a wide paved road that led to a distant gate.

“Main entrance to the estate,” Kryslie announced when she noticed her friends looking that way.

John glanced at the data pad, took time to decipher the Tymorean script and pointed to a long tall building showing above the trees. “That is the Government building, right?”

“Spot on,” Tymos confirmed. “Most of the top administrators of this world work from there. The top two floors have guest quarters for visiting dignitaries.”

Keith spotted a similar building on the other side of the road. “What is that building then?”

“Guard Headquarters,” Tymos said, recalling the details on the map, and other details he had picked up. “The Palace Guards, the Road Guards and the Peace Corps work from there. The barracks are there too.”

“Am I right in thinking there is another garden further down?” John asked.

“Yes, do you want to...?”

One of the escorting guards coughed politely and Kryslie turned around.

“Princess Kryslie, the older Royal children are in the Government Gardens. The Governors have not approved the new citizens to meet them yet.”

Tymos guessed the situation and said, “We can do that another day. I was going to show you the large lyceum and it is almost time for the lessons to finish. I don’t know about you, but I am starving.”

Neither John nor Keith were worried about not going that way, and followed Tymos through between President Reslic’s palace and the other side of the High King’s palace. The large lyceum was on their left, though they did not go close to it, instead they turned right and continued on to the area behind Tymoros’s palace.

There, servants were busy setting up tables in clusters under the ornamental trees. Kryslie explained, “This area is the Royal Court. Most people come here for their evening meal. It is held out here most of the year.”

As they crossed the area, the servants noticed the group and bowed in respect to Tymos and Kryslie.

John spoke under his breath to Tymos. “I know some of the servants think we are jumped up commoners, so they must be bowing to you and Kryslie. How come? I know Governor Tymoros is fostering you, but you are from Earth too, like us.”

Tymos glanced at Kryslie before explaining. “Krys and I are Heir Designates to His Majesty.”

“Oh wow,” Keith whistled. “So are we supposed to bow to you as well?”

“Please don’t, unless you get told to,” Kryslie said quickly. “It is more than enough that the servants do.”

“Fact is,” Tymos added. “We may have that rank, but we have absolutely no authority over anyone. In fact, Morov, my attendant, has more authority than I do.”

“And Delia keeps telling me what I am meant to be doing,” Kryslie added. “Doesn’t your attendant do that?”

“Yeah,” John agreed. “But he has been a great help, really. This is all so strange. I still find it hard to believe I am not still on Earth somewhere. I keep expecting to wake up and have my boss firing me for goofing off.”

Tymos caught John’s arm and stopped him walking on. Kryslie and Keith stopped as well.

“The four of us are unusual,” Tymos said soberly. “Krys and I don’t even know why we developed the power we have, but Father implies that there must be a reason. If that is true for us, it is no less so for you two. Would you really want to go back to Earth? Krys and I don’t recall our life there, but that isn’t the issue. We know we need to master our power.”

“They will begin training you both in earnest soon,” Kryslie predicted. “If it would be easier, you could ask Governor Xyron to suppress your memories...”

John interrupted with, "That doesn't matter. I can already tell that my life here has so much more potential. I can't help feeling that as they have you helping us that we are important - perhaps we are meant to help you."

Tymos shrugged.

John copied him and added, "Let's just say that being friends with Governor Tymoros's heirs is a huge jump in status, and I can do things now that I couldn't do before."

Keith said quietly, "Like using a transmitter."

"Yeah, like that. Anyway, I have been thinking I should change my name...like you two did."

Tymos and Kryslie waited for John to continue.

"Jonko," he decided. "Like my name, but...more."

"Jonko," Tymos repeated, and then he met Keith's eyes as if asking a question.

Keith shook his head as if disagreeing, but he wasn't. "I have absolutely no desire to return to my old life." It came out sounding like a shameful admission. "I never told you the kind of life I had at home. I have lived with a succession of foster parents, and the last lot were horrid. I don't miss them at all. Can you suggest a new name for me?"

"Keleb," Tymos suggested after a pause for thought. Keith tried the name softly and nodded.

"I am Keleb."

A tinkling chime sounded.

"That's the signal for the end of lessons," Kryslie explained. "Where are you expected to be now?"

"I have no idea," Jonko shrugged. He glanced around to look for his attendant. The man had appeared as if conjured.

"You are to dine with his Excellency Governor Xyron this evening," the man stated.

"I think I would prefer to go back to the infirmary," Keleb said. "I am starting to feel really tired."

Tymos turned to his friend and saw his face was very pale and his eyes were blank. He reached out just as Keleb began to shiver violently and grabbed him before his legs began to buckle. However, a violent spasm sent Keleb's arms jerking out.

Kryslie saw her brother flung sideways, and felt the power in the blow as if it had struck her. Before she could move to help her brother, the nearest security guard restrained her. A second guard went to Keleb and was holding his flailing arms down onto the ground. Kryslie twisted around, to demand she be allowed to help her brother, but saw a third guard speaking into an inconspicuous communicator. The fourth was ordering the group of servants coming to help Prince Tymos, to move back and return to work.

Jonko's attendant was holding him firmly, and Keleb's was kneeling beside his charge and speaking in calm tones, that were having no effect on Keleb.

"Damn it all!" Jonko swore, still trying to wrest himself free. "Why is he like that again? Can't they see he can't help it? What are they doing to him?"

"The spasms are abating, Jonko," Kryslie told him. "What ever he is doing is helping."

"I don't understand." Jonko was still trying to get free to help his friend.

Kryslie glanced at her brother, sensed nothing from his mind, sighed and tried again.

"You two are still at a difficult stage. You have become stronger, smarter, and more physically able than you were. However, your body is still not used to the power you received, and you have only just started to learn how to control it and use it."

"So?"

"When you are tired, the power can control your movements. With training, and when you are fully acclimatised, the spasms will abate."

Medics brought two stretchers; Keleb was lifted onto one, still jerking, but only feebly. An oval of purple light appeared nearby, hovering in the air. The two medic stretcher-bearers walked into the oval of light and disappeared. Keleb's attendant followed. Morov and Delia appeared through it moments later.

"What about Tymos? Are they just going to leave him there?" Jonko demanded.

"Help is coming, master Jonko," his attendant assured him.

Kryslie added, "He'll be fine. Keleb needed attention first. Tym and I are more used to being here."

Jonko accepted that, and Kryslie was relieved. He didn't need to know how forcefully Keleb had struck her twin, or how, at the instant of contact, a surge of power had seared her mind. She had a violent headache and was beginning to feel her body trembling.

To distract them both, she commented, "You wouldn't worry about Tym if you knew how hard Perrin Reslic has been pounding us each afternoon."

"Even though you are Heir Designates?" Jonko asked in surprise.

"That rank has no privileges for us yet and probably because we are that, and we didn't get all the early training the youngsters here get. He keeps telling us that the other youngsters can do this or that better than we do, and mutters about strength to power ratios..."

Jonko shook his head. "What are you talking about?"

"Just that..." Kryslie stopped when Keleb's attendant returned, and spoke to Jonko.

"You are to go to the rooms that have been assigned to you and a meal will be brought there. Your Guardian will wish to speak to you later."

"Kryslie?" Jonko asked as his attendant urged him towards the purple glow.

She managed a grin. "I'm fine and they had better not try to make me leave before they come for my brother."

Morov was hovering over Tymos when Alexon arrived with the two returning med-techs. Tymos arrived while he was examining Tymos.

The guard stepped back from Kryslie as Tymos asked what had happened.

"Keleb said he was tired, Father. Tymos was in the wrong place."

"Keleb?" Tymos queried.

"Keith and John have decided to change their names. They like it here," Kryslie said quickly. She was watching her brother being lifted onto a stretcher. He was taken away and Alexon approached.

"Concussion," he reported to Tymos. "And a bit of backlash from the power surge. We'll treat him and keep him asleep until morning."

Kryslie felt some tension leave her father. "Delia, bring Kryslie to my suite once she has cleaned up for dinner. I think that a quiet meal there would be best."

"I will come by later and check you over, Princess Kryslie," Alexon said.

"But I'm fine. I wasn't knocked out."

"Perhaps so," Alexon agreed. "But a shock to your brother may affect you."

Kryslie was about to object when her father spoke. "An excellent idea, Alexon, and I won't permit objections, Kryslie. If you think back to the incident when your brother was lost, you ought to agree."

She did think back and decided her current weird feelings were due to sensing her brother's hurt through the twin bond. She did not think Alexon could do anything about that.

The sonic shower in her suite eased the headache and most of the shakiness. When she had finished Kryslie felt tired and would have preferred to go straight to bed. Delia though, being obedient to orders, chivvied her charge into agreeing to eat first. She frowned thoughtfully when Kryslie allowed herself to be helped to dress. Lately her mistress had protested forcefully if Delia tried to help her.

Nor did Kryslie object when Delia transmitted her to the High King's suite, but she went directly to one of the deep armchairs and collapsed into it.

She barely ate anything of the meal, even when given it on a tray. When Alexon came to check her over, she admitted to being tired and didn't notice the glance that Alexon exchanged with Tymorous. She heard him say, "It seems to be an empathic reaction to her brother's accident. There is nothing that I can find to suggest otherwise. Delia, would you help her to bed. Sleep is probably the best idea."

It was a relief when Kryslie climbed into her bed. It felt blissful, and she didn't even remember to dismiss Delia for the night. She was sure she would soon be asleep....

She wasn't.

After lying awake for an hour, Kryslie left her bed and went to get a drink from the tiny cooler in the main section of her private room. Only when she had the drink in her hand did she realise how hot she felt and she placed the cool bottle against her flushed face. When it no longer felt cool, she drank a mouthful and immediately felt sick. Leaving the bottle on top of the cooler, she went to the nearest chair to sit down. Even sitting up, she was unable to sleep. Her head seemed to be spinning...

"Delia...." she called, as her whole body began to shake.

Even though her work shift ended once Kryslie had finished her evening meal, Delia had not left her mistress's suite. Before being assigned to Kryslie, she had been a medical technician, and was familiar with the signs of transition sickness. Her senses had been warning her, even before taking Kryslie to have her meal.

Governor Xyron had warned her, once she had been assigned, that Kryslie and her brother might transition to second stage without warning. He hoped that the training they had received would be enough to lessen the abruptness. However, with children that were raised on alien worlds, sometimes it wasn't.

Delia mentally considered the unsaid facts. Kryslie and her brother must have a very high potential or they would not have become the High King's Heir Designates. She had seen it before, high potential, insufficient training... but the teachers had been pleased with her mistress's progress.

None of the thoughts vanquished the uneasy feeling, so Delia sat herself in one of the chairs in the outer suite and resigned herself to a sleepless night.

The suite was quiet, but with the door to the sleeping area open, she was aware of Kryslie getting up, going to get a drink, moving to the chair and debated going in...until Kryslie called for her.

Within moments, Delia had evaluated Kryslie's symptoms and was using the communicator near the door to summon medics.

The first to arrive, however, was Tymoros, even though Delia had not dared to disturb him. She was relieved though, because as soon as he arrived, he went to his daughter and took one of her hands. Kryslie's shivering abated immediately.

Her voice was barely audible when she asked, "Father, what is the matter with me. I am so cold and dizzy and nauseous."

"Transition sickness," Tymoros said calmly. "This is not unexpected. The medics can give you something to make you sleep until the worst is past."

"I hope they hurry, but I don't think I can swallow anything."

"Just sit back and try to relax. Try one of the basic meditation exercises."

Delia busied herself by collecting things her mistress would need for a stay in the infirmary, but she kept glancing at Tymoros and felt he needed to take his own advice. Not that she could blame him for being tense and worried. First with Tymos being concussed, and now with Kryslie being ill.

Transition sickness was serious when the child wasn't prepared for it, or some shock brought it on. The first few hours after the onset, were the most critical.

It seemed like a long time before Alexon transmitted into the room. He examined Kryslie with his hand held diagnostic scanner and spoke quietly to Tymoros.

Delia heard him reply, "I have grounded the power build up, but it is still surging."

Alexon told Kryslie he was going to give her an injection, but she didn't seem aware of his words or the hypo-spray that touched her neck. That was the fastest way to get medication into a patient and Kryslie was asleep in seconds.

"I will organise a stretcher," Alexon said, putting the hypo-sprayer back in a pouch on his belt.

Tymoros overruled him. "I will carry her to the infirmary. That way I can keep damping the power surges."

"As you wish, Sire. I have an intensive care unit ready."

Delia accompanied them when they transmitted to the infirmary, and kept her own worries hidden. She helped the med techs settle her mistress, and to attach the medical monitors. When she had finished, she had questions for the young med-tech and his answers did not reassure her.

"Often with twins, there is a bond. It seems that the shock of her brother's accident brought on the transition and negated the control she has achieved. When they arrived, both Kryslie and her brother were in the early stages of transition, and Governor Xyron had to block it. They don't need to do it often, but it usually enables the child to get enough training. However, we think that the channels that handle the power were already part way open, and the power is surging and backing up."

"I see," Delia managed to sound neutral and uninvolved. "That makes sense."

Too much, she thought as she moved away. It explained by Tymoros was hovering and staying in contact with Kryslie. If he was grounding out the power surges, and Alexon had not raised objections, did that mean the surges were so strong that only one of the Governor's could handle them?

She watched Tymoros face for a while and saw the occasional twitches in his muscles and face. She felt sympathy for him, and sent a mental plea to the guardians to help Kryslie through the crisis.

She jumped when Aldiv ghosted up behind her.

"Prince Tymos is sleeping easily and his concussion is healing. How is Princess Kryslie?"

A shrug was all Delia could give for an answer. In this critical time, if the power surges were too great, brain damage could result.

"It isn't fair," Delia whispered. "His Majesty has come to love them like his own and they may die - like all the others."

She felt the gentle hand on her shoulder. "Have faith. The Guardians did not bring them here just so they could die. My master will fight with all he has to keep them alive. At least this time he can do something."

Aldiv moved away and went to ask Tymoros if he had further need for him. A headshake was all the answer he got.

"I will see he eats and drinks," Delia offered. "I am not going anywhere."

With a smile of understanding, Aldiv accepted the offer.

It had gone from afternoon to full night, and Delia was dozing in a chair, though still with her mind attuned to the rhythm of the monitors and the sounds of Kryslie's breathing. Near midnight, she woke when the door to the room swished open. At first, she thought it was the medical attendant coming to check on Kryslie, but the voice that spoke to Tymoros was that of his consort, Tanya.

"You need to go and rest/ I will stay with Kryslie."

"No, I need to be here, to protect her," Tymoros's voice was low and desperate.

Tanya tried to convince him, but nothing she said made a difference. She glanced over at Delia, and in the dim light, it seemed as if her eyes were asking for help.

Delia thought His Majesty should go and rest, so she rose and came over to the bed. There, she scanned the readings in the data pad hanging at the end of the bed, and then checked the playback on each monitor.

“How is she?” Tanya asked.

“The readings have been stable for the last hour. They are still very high, but no surges. I think you have done all you can for now, you should rest while you can. I expect her brother will contrive to catch up with her as soon as he wakes up.”

“You’re right,” Tymoros agreed, standing up and grimacing as his muscles protested. “My son should be waking in the morning.”

Tanya sat where her consort had been, and took hold of Kryslie’s hand. The dim lights showed her pale face, seemingly merely asleep. This child was something special. An incredible miracle, a child so genetically like Tymoros that she could have been sired by him and yet wasn’t. It didn’t matter though. Since Kryslie and her brother had been around, her consort had begun to smile more often, and the deep sadness that she had always sensed in him, had eased. She was thankful for that.

The deaths of his five children had effectively killed Morai, Tymoros’s first consort. As serene as she had been, the grief had been stronger. Tymoros had grieved deeply. Morai had been his much-loved consort for twenty-four years.

Tanya had known all that when Tymoros had proposed to her. She had understood his reluctance to sire more children if he had to watch them die. Yet he was High King and subject to the ancient law that he must marry again to produce heirs to inherit from him. Yet, try as she might, for the ten years since they had been together, she had not conceived. Yet it wasn’t because she was barren, or Ty infertile. Maybe it just hadn’t been the right time...

Kryslie and her brother had to be gifts from the Guardians of Peace, and perhaps they had needed to come here before...they allowed her to conceive. Maybe they were to be the protectors of her child.

Tanya placed a hand on her stomach and thought of the joyous news she had received that very afternoon, thought of the royal child she had finally conceived.

Whatever the reason, it seemed that the coming of Tymos and Kryslie had brought about the miracle she had prayed for.

Morning came, and within moments of waking, Tymos began to shiver violently. Morov summoned Alexon immediately. Within a very short time, Tymos was in a bed next to his sister.

Tymoros returned and sat with him, as he had done for Kryslie. He sent Morov off to bed, and Delia to have breakfast.

Tanya did not leave immediately, but sat on the arm of the chair with an arm around her consort’s shoulder. She wanted to share her news with him, but she sensed his mind was elsewhere. He wasn’t completely ignoring her, for he answered her questions. She asked why he was so worried about Tymos and Kryslie when Royal children had transitioned from first to second stage for generations.

Tymoros favoured her with a smile. “You’ve mainly been involved with the young ones,” he said resting his head on her shoulder. “You don’t have much to do with them once they have left the nursery. Transition isn’t usually a problem. Most children experience some discomfort, but they are well prepared for the increase in their abilities. It is not quite like when a boy’s voice changes, or when a child begins puberty, but the problems are usually no worse. Sometimes, they become hyperactive, because they have so much more energy and power than they can control. Their training isn’t the problem, and we supervise them, keep them physically and mentally challenged and they settle very quickly.”

“But Tymos and Kryslie haven’t been here very long,” Tanya said thoughtfully. “Were they not trained wherever they were before?”

Tymoros shook his head. “No, they were quite unexpected, as their biological parents were not both Tymorean born. That leads to the other problem. They have a very high potential, and I don’t think they have reached it yet. Much of their present power has been channelled into aiding their bodies to withstand the higher gravity we have here. We are doing everything we can to help them build their physique. That is happening, slowly. You may have noticed that their hair has changed to red? They are slowly becoming more Tymorean than Earth human.”

Tanya used her free hand to stroke Tymoros’s cheek; she knew it relaxed him. “Well, I believe that they will be well soon.”

“I want to believe that,” Tymoros said in a low voice.

“They will. If you believe that the Guardians created them and hid them until now to be safe, then I believe they are here now to protect their baby brother.”

Tymoros tensed and shifted his position to see his consort’s face. “Do you mean....Are you...?” He couldn’t articulate the wild hope she had just given him.

“Yes. Xyron confirmed it. I am six weeks pregnant.”

When their pulse and breathing returned to normal, Tymos and Kryslie were taken to Professor Xyron’s laboratory for observation. They slept for a further day before waking.

Kryslie had roused first. She recognized her surroundings and was not surprised to find herself wearing one of the pale blue isolation suits.

Tymos woke a few minutes later. He rolled onto his side, saw his sister sitting up and grinned wryly. “Do I look as haggard as you do?”

She nodded.

“I feel disgustingly well,” he commented. “So why are we in the glass cage?”

Kryslie simply pointed to the objects on the floor.

“You saw Jonko and Keleb,” she reminded him. “Let’s see what we can do.”

She reached for a metal cube and threw it at her brother. “Catch!”

The object had felt light, and in fact, her gentle throw sent the thing flying at Tymos at high speed. He acted instinctively to catch the metal ingot in a firm grip before it slammed into his chest. Once his hands stopped stinging from the impact, he examined the ingot and saw where his fingers had pressed into the metal. With deliberate intent, he easily moulded the metal into a ball and rolled it back at his sister.

Kryslie jumped to avoid having her foot broken. Tymos gasped in amazement when he saw her rise halfway to the ceiling. However, she landed heavily.

“Ouch!” was her comment as she pushed herself up from the floor. “I was only trying to hop over your little projectile.”

Tymos shook his head in disbelief. “Wow! I mean, I don’t feel any different. I’m not going to try that. If I did, I think I’d hit the ceiling.”

“Well, I guess that’s why we are in here,” Kryslie’s voice shook. “Imagine what would have happened if we were like this and were playing with the little ones...”

“Yeah,” Tymos saw the picture, too clearly, and shuddered. “Do you think we’d better find out the worst?”

Kryslie nodded.

With out any conversation between them they scientifically investigated the objects placed within the room - first the solid objects and then those of lesser strength. They didn’t try to control themselves. The solid objects warped and the lesser objects broke or shattered.

Kryslie sat back on her mattress and surveyed the mess. “I wonder how many times we can wreck our toys?” she thought to herself and was startled by the grin on her twin’s face.

“Oh, I think we can do this as often as we like and get away with it!” he thought in turn, and Kryslie heard the words in her head.

She grinned back – this was better than simply thinking alike.

“The challenge I suppose is to withhold our strength,” Kryslie thought with a glance at her brother.

Tymos nodded and spoke aloud this time. “I wouldn’t mind some food if there are any utensils proof against us.” He looked pointedly at where he knew the observation room was situated. He had no doubt that they were being monitored even though they had seen no one in Xyron’s laboratory since waking.

Xyron responded to Tymos’s remark. He transmitted into the room.

“How are you feeling?”

“I woke up feeling great,” Kryslie admitted. “But now I am feeling shaky.”

“Me too,” Tymos agreed. “Are we relapsing? Is this normal for other people?”

“You are over the transition sickness. Now it is just a matter of realising your new strength. The walls are simply to contain your experiments. Once you can demonstrate a degree of control, I will entrust you back in your father’s care.”

“Yeah, the strength bit we’ve figured that. Control is still a way off. Can we have new toys to experiment with?” Tymos asked.

“I want you to eat and rest before you do anymore. Control is always harder when you are tired. After you have rested, there will be fresh ‘toys’ for you. I will have two of the med-techs help you to the necessary, and then bring you your food. If you break the utensils, you will need to use your fingers. They should be proof against your strength.”

Tymos grinned wryly at having his joke returned to him. He smiled wryly when he did end up using his fingers to eat with.

They had no choice about resting, their food contained a relaxant and they fell asleep soon after eating all of the high-energy meal. The pattern was repeated over the next few days as they tried to control their strength, so nothing was warped or broken.

It was not until the fifth day, that they succeeded in lasting all day without breaking anything. Kryslie was almost crying with exhaustion, and Tymos was trembling when Xyron entered the room.

“You have done very well,” he told both children.

“I feel dreadful,” Tymos refuted. “Worse than when you put us in here.”

With a gesture, Xyron directed Tymos to lie on one of the beds. This had become a routine matter, so Tymos was ready for the diagnostic machine to come down over him.

“Everything is fine,” Xyron assured him. “I’ll have the kitchen staff prepare you a high energy meal. A good night’s rest will complete the cure. In the morning you will be able to go back to your father’s care.”

As soon as Xyron released them into the care of their attendants, Kryslie and Tymos requested to go to their own suites. Then, when they had shed the infirmary suits, and donned comfortable day clothes, they went to speak with their foster father.

Tymoros was in his private sanctum, preparing for his day’s work. When he heard the gentle knock, he indicated with a glance for his attendant, Aldiv, to open the door.

His children entered, bowed in unison – with the correct degree of respect, and stood waiting for his attention.

Tymoros left his work and walked from behind his desk. He smiled at them, “Come and sit down. I am glad to see you have recovered.” He did not mention that they still lacked colour and the bones of their faces were sharply defined.

He settled himself in his favourite chair, in a corner away from his desk. He gestured for his children to come closer. Kryslie took a cushion from a two-seater couch and settled on it so she

could lean against her foster father's chair. Tymos pulled up a second chair. Both were glad they did not have to stand.

"Father, Governor Xyron told us to come and talk to you before our appointment with President Reslic," Tymos said quietly.

"I wanted to reassure myself that you were well again," he admitted. I also need to explain some things to you. Things that you might not be aware of since you did not grow up on Tymorea."

Kryslie looked at him expectantly.

"I know you have learnt about your increased strength, and perhaps you may now realise why we needed to keep you closely observed. We could not predict when you would come into your adult power."

"We might have hurt some of the youngsters," Kryslie said.

Tymoros reached down an arm and hugged her. He drew Tymos into the embrace with the other arm, and felt the tension leaving both of them.

"There will be other abilities you will become aware of. Your senses should be sharper, as well as your ability to learn and reason. In all ways, you should be physically more able. The afternoon exercises that you will be given to do are designed to make you aware of all your new abilities and teach you to call on them at need. That is why Jono will be evaluating you today. Of course, all the senior students are under his supervision and by now, you know that he expects total compliance and total effort from all his students."

Kryslie nodded. She knew that very well.

"I still don't know why we have this power," Tymos blurted.

"Nor do I, but I will ever be grateful to the Guardians of Peace that they bestowed it on you." Tymoros did not try to hide the trace of tears in his eyes. "Now you must put all your will into mastering that power."

"It is hard," Kryslie said, hugging her knees. "I am afraid of touching anything in case I break something or hurt someone."

"That you are thinking that way is a positive sign," Tymoros commended. "The Supreme Guardians deplore weakness. Weak minds can be influenced to evil deeds and seek power for themselves or will turn on and destroy things they can't control. We train our children to be strong; to seek peace, not destruction."

"But what if we can't? What if we fail?" Tymos asked.

Fleeting thoughts passed through Tymoros's mind. An incident in his youth, a bright haired girl, once sweet natured, becoming a screaming harridan and causing grief to many before ... his father had acted.

Tymoros sharply blocked the memory. He took a deep, calming breath.

"You must master the power and make it your servant. We don't make the training easy and we will test you in many ways. To feel daunted just now, before you start, is to be expected. No one says you can't ask for help."

"I know that," Tymos agreed. "But what if it does get too much..." He tried not to think about the glimpse he had had into Tymoros's mind, or his fleeting memory of Zacary.

"If we see that your control is weakening, we will administer any necessary corrective measures."

Kryslie shuddered. "Father, we won't give you – or the Guardians – any reason to be angry with us," she promised. She reached an arm around the King's leg and hugged it.

"We will trust your judgement, Father," Tymos said, quietly. He wished he could forget that unwittingly shared vision. He sensed his twin searching for a distraction and was relieved when she spoke up.

"Father? What language are we speaking?"

"The main Tymorean dialect," Tymoros answered, and then waited for Kryslie to continue.

“Is it the same language ... I mean, I think we were speaking this dialect when we were talking to Jonko and Keleb, and they always understood us. Yet they didn’t understand anyone else for a while.”

“It may be you have some telepathy and can project the meaning of your words directly to them,” Tymoros suggested. “Some of us have that ability.”

Kryslie glanced up at her twin. Tymos merely shrugged. “More than a touch,” he thought at her.

“We did notice that your friends’ grasp of our language improved once you were spending time with them. In fact, they were granted Tymorean citizenship yesterday, under Xyron’s sponsorship. They are being evaluated this morning to see where they will start in the large lyceum.”

“Can we introduce them to our friends now?” Tymos asked, looking hopeful.

“That would be a good idea,” Tymoros agreed and Tymos grinned. “After Jono has finished with you, you can join them down on the Royal Court for lunch. Enchon will find you afterwards to get your room terminals logged into the education web and the compedia.”

Tymos looked interested. He hadn’t had much time to use the terminal in his room yet.

“Then this evening, you might like to join Tanya and I for the evening meal.”

Tymos and Kryslie decided to change into clothing suitable for exercise - loose fitting coveralls in a tough reddish brown fabric. These were not the same as most students wore, for they had the two gold stripes around collar and cuffs to indicate they were of high rank and in the High King’s family. Even with the detour, they were still early for their appointment and sat outside Reslic’s private gymnasium, to wait. Within the President’s palace, they did not have their normal guard-escorts, and that was refreshing. They jumped up when Jonko and Keleb emerged from the room, flushed and smiling. Both were subtly different now, compared to a week ago.

“Tymos, Kryslie, where’ve you been?” Jonko asked, grinning delightedly at seeing them.

“In your glass cage,” Tymos said lightly.

“Why?” Keleb asked, then added, “Oh, yes. You had transition sickness. I heard the servants talking. They were acting as if you were at death’s door.”

“Those servants were being very indiscreet,” Kryslie said, glancing away from her friends.

“Perhaps they were. Though they probably didn’t realise we could understand them. However, I think what they said was true. You both look like hell.”

“Nonsense, they were training us for weeks to prepare us for transition,” Tymos insisted.

“They have been training us to exhaustion to get us over ours!” Jonko retorted. “And we never looked as bad as you do.”

“We’re fine,” Kryslie quietly assured them, though she still had doubts. “I heard they granted you citizenship.”

Jonko touched the gold ring on his right index finger. “Yes, they finally decided to trust us. You notice we no longer have our security guard shadows.”

He didn’t seem to notice that he was rapidly rotating the ring on his finger.

“It has never been a lack of trust,” Tymos answered sharply. “You were at a difficult stage of your development. Even I can see the difference in you now you have begun training. You are calmer and your voices are softer...”

Kryslie continued in a soft voice, “If they didn’t trust you, you wouldn’t be here now. They would never have granted you citizenship or Royal Status.”

“Royal Status?” Jonko queried with eyebrows raised.

“Yes – you are now part of Governor Xyron’s family.” She pointed to the two silver stripes on the clothes they wore.

“We’re half human freaks!” Keleb blurted. “Well, more than half. I had a Tymorean relative three, no four, generations back on my mother’s side. The servants barely tolerate us and don’t

think I haven't worked out that the only other commoners on this estate are the Royal Consorts."

"We can introduce you to our friends at lunchtime today and I think once we all start having lessons in the large lyceum – everyone will realise you belong here."

"You never had that trouble," Jonko noted.

"You never had to have lessons with the babies either," Tymos retorted. "Or have to have someone let you into and out of class, while the same babies were able to transmit themselves."

Jonko grinned at the vision. "No, I guess I didn't and won't either. We have transmitters now too."

"Jon, I think we'd better go to the library," Keleb suddenly suggested, nodding in the direction of an elegantly dressed Royal Attendant.

Tymos turned, recognised Yeven and said a quick, "See you at lunch."

Yeven bowed slightly. "Prince Tymos, Princess Kryslie – the President is waiting for you."

Kryslie answered. "Thank you, Yeven."

The man bowed again and gestured for them to precede him.

Reslic stood in the centre of the equipment. He turned as they approached and watched them as they stopped two feet away and bowed a greeting. After they had straightened, he walked closer to them. First, he held Kryslie's chin in a gentle grip and scanned her face, and then he repeated the action with Tymos. He nodded to himself, and with a slight smile, addressed them.

"Let me see if you can still do your basic exercises. Warm up with a slow trot around the room."

For the next three hours, Reslic worked Tymos and Kryslie until they were dripping with perspiration, and so tired that they could only collapse gracelessly onto a padded mat.

"Well done," Reslic praised them. His own exercise clothes were barely mussed and he was not even perspiring, even though he had performed most of the exercise he had asked them to do.

Neither Tymos nor Kryslie had the energy to reply. They did not notice Reslic summoning his attendant with a gesture or Yeven's return until he came to them with two cups of the lime flavoured restorative drink.

"Drink up," Reslic instructed.

"You have both made an excellent recovery from the transition sickness. You will be able to join your Earth friends in level Zeta, tomorrow."

Kryslie looked up in surprise.

"Level Zeta, Sir? I thought we'd be in the lowest level."

"Are you questioning my judgement, Princess Kryslie?"

"No, Sir," Kryslie answered quickly. "It's just that I know we have missed a lot of lessons."

"Zeta," Reslic repeated. "And I will arrange for you to have extra lessons to make up for the five years you missed."

Reslic hid a smile when he saw Tymos scowl at his twin.

"Go and collect your friends from the library. It is almost lunchtime. I believe that Stenn is most anxious to meet them."

Chapter 14 - Large Lyceum

Tymos and Kryslie joined the assembly in the Large lyceum, and with Jonko and Keleb, were introduced to all the students they had not met previously. The lyceum was a round structure, with seating in tiers looking down to where the teacher stood on a podium. Before the lessons started, all the students gathered around the newcomers. Tymos and Kryslie found themselves especially welcomed, as they were the High King's 'lost' heirs. Jonko and Keleb had an advantage that morning as Denlic had introduced his new foster brothers to his family the previous night and five of the older students were his siblings.

Stenn Reslic was delighted that Tymos and Kryslie were in his level. He made no comment about the placement, even though he had started from a lower level and graduated to level Zeta six months previously.

When an elderly gray haired man arrived, the students split into smaller groups and went to sit in neatly sectioned areas of the tiers.

"That's Enchon," Stenn whispered to Tymos, though the other newcomers heard him. He led them to the part of the seating where the letter 'zeta' was painted on the wall at the back.

Enchon waited for the groups to settle and officially welcomed the new students, and made a few general announcements. Then seven other teachers, mostly men, but a couple were women, went to the other group and partitions began to extend from slots in the wall, partitioning the circle into eight sections.

With in level zeta's area, twelve students remained. Stenn hovered on the tier above Tymos and Kryslie, while Jonko and Keleb were sitting near Denlic. Lexina moved nearer Kryslie and away from the other three girls of the group who were all, dressed to impress the three new boys. The last two were older boys, distant cousins of both Stenn and Denlic.

Enchon placed eight data pads on the nearest study desk and told the longer-term level zeta students to take one and get to work. Stenn and Denlic were told they didn't need to hover when the newcomers were beckoned into a close group.

"I don't know what you might be used to," Enchon began, in a tone implying he wanted no argument. "But here we run lessons in a cycle. Your fellow students currently know a lot more than any of you, but that won't be a handicap. When they have graduated up to the next level, you will continue on with the work you missed until you in turn graduate."

Tymos nodded. The idea made sense.

Enchon didn't pause; he kept on with what was beginning to sound like a prepared speech. "You are privileged to be here, and I don't want to hear how you did things anywhere else. Here you have access to information on many subjects and you get to use advanced technology that allows you to learn not just about this world, but about all the worlds that Tymoreans have ever been to or sent missionaries to."

That statement startled Jonko. He had questions, but Enchon wasn't giving any of them time to speak.

"Many of the students who pass through here, go on to become missionaries and on those far flung worlds, they need to be able to adapt to the different cultures and customs as well as to various levels of technology.

Kryslie did manage to insert a question. Enchon listened but his face showed a frown of displeasure. "Do Tymorean commoners ever get access to this learning?"

Enchon drew a breath and changed thought streams. "You will learn about the commoners of this world as part of your studies. However, to answer your question, relatively few are interested in learning more than they need for their work. Of course, all children are taught to read and write. Those that want to learn more than the basics can seek out the scholars in the cities. There are a good many with a scholarly aptitude that have gone on to join the Space fleet.

Those who wish to join the Peace Corps are expected to study subjects relative to the required duties.”

“Do they have access to technology too?” Keleb asked.

“We do not deny them access, but few really understand it or want to use it.” Enchon brushed the topic aside to continue his spiel. “Here we will have lectures on different topics, and questions to answer to show your understanding. You will also have questions to finish each evening, to reinforce the lesson, and to let your teachers know where you might need to have more teaching. Sometimes this will involve searching for answers on the compedia.”

Enchon stopped speaking and almost dared the new students to object to the method of teaching. “After the noon break, all levels do their physical training. It would be advisable to change into the exercise clothes that are provided for you. However, right now, I have a data pad for each of you. I want you to read the lesson, and do the exercises. They will get you used to using the compedia. If you have any trouble come to me. Go and sit where you like.”

Once they had their work, he left them alone, and went to sit at a desk on the podium. After an hour, Enchon recalled the attention of the students and began a lecture on the geology of the far western hills. After that, the students were set work related to their individual learning plans.

At the end of the morning, Stenn collected five data pads from the front desk, and handed each of the new students one.

“What’s this?” Keleb asked.

“The questions on Enchon’s lecture,” Stenn said loftily. “Put the ones you’ve been working on this morning on the desk. Enchon will go through what you have done and let you know how well you did.”

“The other ones are to be returned tomorrow morning, completed,” a new voice startled the group.

Tymos smelt a whiff of cedar as he turned to the speaker.

“So people, who spend more time messing with who knows what, will get marks against them for handing the work in late.”

Stenn’s grin became stiffer. “D’ic, you wouldn’t know who First Gunner Konn is talking about, would you?”

“Idiot,” Denlic retorted.

Lexina whispered in Kryslie’s ear as Stenn suddenly hugged the newcomer.

“That’s Stenn’s older brother. I hadn’t heard he was on leave from the Space Fleet.”

“Congratulations on your promotion, Brother,” Stenn said sincerely. “So why are you here?”

“Oh, I’ll be teaching you children something about Astronomy for a few days.” Konn said casually, grinning as Stenn groaned in mock disgust.

Konn Reslic accessed the terminal at the front of the class. “Well, you’ve all been working diligently today. Even the newcomers. I guess you can all go off to lunch.”

Tymos and Kryslie were not surprised to see President Reslic standing in the centre of the Lyceum as the levels assembled after lunch. They were used to having him as their trainer. Keleb, however, emitted a startled exclamation, quickly suppressed as Reslic turned in his direction, even whilst continuing to send groups off with their training instructions and one of his assistants.

Stenn showed no signs of embarrassment when it became apparent that his father would be supervising his level. He grinned, maliciously, when he saw his brother follow their group out to the Government Gardens.

Denlic sidled closer to Stenn as they walked. “Don’t push your luck, Stenn.”

“Nah, Konn’s just off space duty. Those little ships he was on don’t have facilities for more than basic fitness. I reckon I’ll be just about a match for him today.”

“With your Father watching?” Denlic pointed out.

“Best time, don’t you think?” Stenn countered and Denlic merely shook his head.

“Slow trot, three times around the clearing,” Jono Reslic, instructed his students as soon as they arrived in the area where they were to train. He sent Konn to warm up as well. After the running, Reslic called out the stretching exercises he wanted them to perform.

The first part of the afternoon passed with each student practicing the exercises Reslic set for them.

Konn was delegated the task of demonstrating to the newest students, Jonko and Keleb, four basic defensive body movements. Once they had them memorised, they had to keep practicing each in turn.

The same movements were familiar to Tymos and Kryslie, from their recent skills sessions with Perrin Reslic, but this time they were to practice them while the two oldest boys in level Zeta, tried to poke them with short poles that were about two arms lengths long.

Lexina, Denlic and Stenn were set exercises that were more complex, which they practiced as a group. The other three girls from level Zeta were doing exercises that looked more like dancing than fighting.

Then Reslic worked with each student in turn, correcting their movements and testing their skill. He seemed to know at all times what each student was doing. At regular intervals, he switched the pairs around. While Lexina was partnered with Kryslie, she explained that the three girls, who had snubbed the newcomers all morning, were too delicate to be fighters and were intending to become travelling performers when they were old enough to leave lessons. She shrugged, and added, “I intend to do something more useful with my life, and I would rather know how to defend myself than expect others to do it for me.”

At the same time, when Stenn was paired with Tymos, he explained that Lothan and Heric, the older boys, preferred slash and bash weapons and were hopeless with anything technical.

When the next change came, Tymos was paired with Kryslie, Jonko with Keleb, Lexina with Denlic and Reslic summoned Stenn to him. His friends heard him chuckle quietly as he went to where Konn was doing breathing exercises after a strenuous bout against his father. They began to challenge each other using some form of martial art.

Kryslie was aware of Denlic watching Stenn, and angled herself so she and Tymos could observe as well. She found it easy to keep Stenn and Konn in her peripheral vision and still appear to be concentrating on her own task. Her awareness of her brother’s presence and actions made their practice moves seem like a single person shadow boxing against a mirror. It was more instinct than anything that told her how to move when her brother attacked with the short pole, and when it was her turn to attack, she knew where her brother was.

Lexina and Denlic gradually moved closer to Tymos and Kryslie. Only Jonko and Keleb, practicing spinning the short poles, seemed oblivious to the subtle tension between Stenn and his brother.

“By the look on Konn’s face, I’d say he thinks it below his new dignity to practice with children,” Lexina muttered quietly to Kryslie.

“Stenn seemed to be looking forward to this,” Tymos whispered back, having heard the comment.

“He is,” Denlic agreed, “And I think that there is more to this little confrontation than meets the eye.”

“President Reslic doesn’t miss anything,” Kryslie said. “I’d say he had his reasons for pairing those two.”

It was as if Reslic had heard her. The president’s voice called out for Kryslie to pair with Lexina, Jonko to practice with Tymos and Denlic with Keleb. When they had settled back into their drill, Konn and Stenn had engaged in a different form of martial art.

“For someone just off a small cruiser, Konn’s not in too bad shape,” Lexina commented critically. “As far as I can tell, there is not much between them in skill.”

“Konn should be better than Stenn, though, shouldn’t he?” Kryslie suggested, as she deflected an attack from Lexina.

“You’d think so, but I have a hunch President Reslic is trying to drive home a subtle lesson to both of them.” Lexina guessed. “Stenn is much better than he lets on and by the looks of things, he isn’t holding back at the moment.”

At the end of three hours, Reslic called a halt to all exercises and sent the students off to do their cool down routines. Stenn joined his friends with a smug look on his face; Konn Reslic stayed talking with his father (and Supreme Commander). The young officer’s face, already red with exertion, went almost scarlet, before he nodded sharply and trotted off through the trees.

Reslic, called Stenn back, before dismissing the class.

Lexina, Kryslie and Tymos arrived early on the terrace where the kitchen attendants were setting up for the evening meal. Stenn joined them soon after but he was not his normal exuberant self.

“So who won?” Lexina asked, since Stenn was not saying anything.

“Dad called it a draw!”

“That’s good isn’t it?” Kryslie asked.

“Yeah, but Dad thinks I should be up a level, and Enchon won’t pass me on the morning lessons.”

“Why not?”

“Probably because he has a habit of handing his questions in late,” Lexina commented.

“Because...” Kryslie asked, curious.

Stenn suddenly laughed. “Because I haven’t figured out what I want to do with my life, so I’m in no rush to get started. I had thought I’d like to join the fleet, but not if I might have Konn as a senior officer. I don’t fancy the Tymorean Peace Corps, even though two of my brothers are serving with them. And I definitely don’t see my self as an Elder. That would be like having lessons for the rest of my life. I can see that as the perfect life for Gann though. He has absolutely no sense of humour, that brother of mine.”

“So why the sour face,” Lexina asked.

“Dad’s figured me out. He said he will arrange extra lessons for me ... to keep me out of mischief.”

Lexina smirked. “You didn’t really expect to fool him for ever, did you?”

Stenn shrugged.

Kryslie sensed that Stenn was still smarting from that session with his father.

“You know, Stenn, I asked your Father why we weren’t put in the lowest level when we graduated to the large lyceum. I mean, we weren’t here to spend all those years in the small lyceum and we’ve missed a lot of lessons...”

“So he’s giving you extra lessons too, is he,” Stenn’s grin was genuine. “Well, there’s one good reason for staying in the same level as you provincial students. Someone has to teach you some really fundamental things.”

“Like not making idle remarks to the President?” Kryslie suggested.

“Yeah, that’s one thing,” Stenn smiled crookedly. “The other thing is that the only people that start at the lowest level are the ones that usually just make it to level Delta and stop.”

Kryslie had no idea of the significance of that remark.

“I’ll explain later,” Stenn promised as Denlic, Jonko and Keleb arrived. He went into an immediate huddle with the other boys and gestured to Tymos.

Kryslie frowned as her brother, became engrossed in the discussion.

“Don’t mind them,” Lexina advised. “Stenn is probably trying to make the most of his time, if he is going to get extra lessons.”

“He won’t get into trouble, will he?” Kryslie asked.

“I doubt it. Stenn’s pranks are usually harmless fun and he knows where to draw the line – well mostly. Anyway, I thought you might like to come up to the observatory with me later. Dad is on duty and you really haven’t had a chance to learn your way around, have you?”

Distracted by the idea, Kryslie shook her head and decided to quiz her brother later. “This will be only the second time I have eaten with the Royal Court. Father said that if we preferred, we didn’t have to sit with him and could be with our friends, so this feels like the height of freedom.”

Lexina glanced briefly at the two attendants standing unobtrusively nearby, but said nothing. They were simply watching their charges. When it was time for the servants to serve the evening meal, those same attendants served Tymos and Kryslie. Lexina knew that Tymos and Kryslie were probably so used to their attendants’ presence that they were almost invisible, but she wondered why they still needed extra attention.

As the evening grew darker, more lights came on so that the diners on the terrace could see to eat. The night was clear of clouds and very mild, so eating outside was pleasant.

Tymos sat opposite Kryslie during the meal, but disappeared with the other boys as soon as he had finished eating. He had explained mentally that Stenn had access to a virtual weapons practice program. The picture in his mind was of shooting very lifelike enemies. Kryslie shuddered and said she was glad she wasn’t invited.

Instead, she stayed talking to Lexina, dallying over the warm chocolate drink that the servants offered them. When the sun finally set, she watched the brown uniformed security squads deploy out into the grounds. A short time later, heard tinkling bells above the buzz of conversation. No one seemed to pay attention to them.

“That’s the bell for curfew,” Lexina explained, catching his expression of concern. “They did tell you that we are not meant to be wandering around the gardens in the dark, didn’t they?”

Kryslie nodded. “How do we get to the observatory?”

“Use our transmitters,” Lexina said. “Of course, we could always walk. It’s on the top floor of Xyron’s palace.”

“Are you sure there won’t be a problem with us going there?”

“Sure. Dad gets me to monitor some of the stations when I have free time. Besides, you and your brother are Uncle Ty’s heirs, they wouldn’t stop you anyway.”

The entire upper floor of the Xyron’s palace was the “Observatory.” Most of the area contained the monitoring room of the Tymorean Space Scanners. It was their duty to observe the skies around their home planet. The Chief Controller was Lexina’s father, Prince Esmous, who was also the youngest brother of the High King.

Lexina entered without knocking and no one challenged her. Three different workers greeted her by name, raised eyebrows at Kryslie before bowing slightly and continuing with their tasks.

Lexina stood on her toes, trying to spot her father. “I can’t see Dad. He must be in the control room.”

Kryslie took the opportunity to look around. “What are those displays?”

“Geographic data from the five satellites in orbit around the world,” Lexina explained, after identifying which screens Kryslie meant. “The far ones are pictures from the satellites showing anything in space.”

“Can we go into the control room?” Kryslie asked.

“No, that’s only for senior controllers and the Governors. The reports from the missionaries come in there and the reports from the deep space probes. I’m only allowed to be out here.”

Lexina finally spotted her father and dragged Kryslie towards him. “Can I show Kryslie what you do here, Da?”

Prince Esmous smiled and suggested, “You could use the old plasma screen. Link it to the satellite over the second continent. We are getting alarms from the automatic system at irregular intervals. See if you notice anything happening there. It might only be flocks of birds.”

Lexina agreed readily enough and led Kryslie to an unoccupied terminal in one corner of the large open area. They passed rows of intent controllers, each monitoring a screen, the data on which varied widely. Some had what Kryslie recognised as weather maps, others circles with dots and letters.

“I’d like to be able to use one of the newer screens,” Lexina admitted. “But I haven’t been trained on them. Still, I’ll practice on whatever I can,”

While she was activating the system, turning it on, bringing lights onto the screen and adjusting settings to concentrate on the second continent, she explained each step to Kryslie. The latter watched her movements, and stored all the new knowledge into her memory.

After a period of watching Lexina scan segments of the distant second continent, Kryslie found her attention straying. She was feeling a prickle of alarm, as if something of ill intent was watching her.

Looking around, she saw all the nearby controllers were still intent on their screens; no one was paying her any attention. Then movement at the far end of the room caught her eye. Two men were moving to look at the screen of a third.

Lexina, still intent on her ask, said, “I’ve sent a signal to one of the position fixing satellites. Instead of using it in passive observation mode, I have made it active. I can play with the parameters to increase or decrease its cone of vision and to change the magnification.”

Kryslie glanced back at the screen; the high up aerial view was becoming more detailed as if the sensor was coming closer to the ground.

“These satellites are 20,000 kilometres up and there are eight of them orbiting the world. The Peace corps use them to fix their position and guide them to specific places.”

“What do the other controllers look at?” Kryslie asked, her eyes returning to the huddle where three watchers had become five.

“Some are taking weather observations, others are checking ground conditions. In the Season of Storms, they can quickly spot fires started by lightning and get people to help put them out. Some are monitoring the sensor web, which is a network of buoys about 100 km up. The observers on those look for potential space hazards and warn of the approach of trader ships. In the control room, they monitor the relay buoys and record communications from the missionaries.”

“Would that be what the huddle is about?” Kryslie asked and nodded in the direction she was looking.

Lexina glanced up and said, “Probably. Last night, one of the relay buoys gave notification of traders approaching. They will be sending the landing window coordinates and directions for landing.”

Kryslie queried the terminology, and learnt that a ship couldn’t just dive down into the atmosphere.

Lexina also added, “The trader ships have to power right down to a virtual crawl, and once they pass the outer sensors, they glide down until they have air dense enough to work their atmosphere engines. Then they are directed to Dira. That’s where the main spaceport is. If there are storms there, they land at Kestra, but that is way out near the desert.”

A niggling thought in Kryslie’s mind said, “If that is merely a trader ship arriving, why do I feel that something is amiss?”

Prince Esmous joined the huddle, examined the screen and issued orders. Many heads jerked up as he said, "Put all positioning satellites into active mode, and activate the downward sensors of the outer web. We have a sensor ghost following the trader ship. It may be a glitch, or it may be a ship trying to sneak through."

Activity in the room increased, and tension became a palpable sensation. Kryslie felt a shiver run down her spine.

"Do ships try to sneak down often?" she asked Lexina. "Sometimes. Not all other-worlders are friendly. Pirates, smugglers try to bring in undesirable things, or steal stuff from here to sell elsewhere. They usually flee when they realise that we are not as backward as we appear from space."

While Lexina returned her full attention to her task, Kryslie felt the impulse to move towards the screen where the men had earlier huddled. Only Prince Esmous watched over the controllers shoulder now. Kryslie moved quietly, catching the low voices discussing possibilities, and realising in a distant part of her mind that her hearing had become more acute.

The screen that drew her monitored the mountainous region west of the Royal Estate. She heard mention of an 'ion trail' and a 'flare'. The terminology was unfamiliar. Off to her left, the screen monitoring the area around Dira spaceport, showed the trader ship following the landing instructions. A voice, magnified electronically, announced. "Weather balloon alpha-seven-six has just stopped sending. Last position..." The coordinates meant nothing to Kryslie until the man at the mountain viewing screen jerked. "That could have been the flare if something hit alpha-seven-six."

Prince Esmous issued further orders, directing extra sensors onto that area. The room felt like the stillness before a storm broke, the tension vibrated in the air.

"There!" the voice came from the man using one of the newly tuned sensors. He hit the record function as he said, "That's a ship - clear as day."

An electronically generated voice announced, "Omicron, Omicron. Alien activity in sector seven-two, confirmed. Situation code, Red."

Within the next few moments, Governor Xyron and Governor Reslic materialised, scanned the data, and strode into the control room. Soon after that, Kryslie tensed as she heard her twin's mental voice.

"What is happening? They have just put the pilots on leave from the fleet on high alert."

She thought about what was going on in the observatory and received in turn, "Konn and one of the others have just rushed off. Must be serious. Konn was dead set on proving to Stenn what a hot shot he is with weapons."

Beyond that thought, was the image of Stenn furiously blasting away at computer-generated targets.

Kryslie moved back near Lexina, still listening to the low voiced conversations around various screens. She heard, "Flight One have launched," and Reslic confirming that a ground patrol would head out from Tantra within the hour.

A short time later, much too soon for the air patrol to have reached their target, a voice rose above the murmur to report, "It's taking off!"

"Get a tracer on it!" Prince Esmous directed immediately.

The next report was a deflated, "Lost it, Sir. It turned and blasted straight up. All I have is the ion trail. It must have cloaked."

"All eyes on the feeds from the sensor web. We might spot that sensor ghost effect." Prince Esmous was following his own instruction.

Time passed. No one reported seeing, or even thinking they saw, any trace of the ship. Kryslie concentrated on Lexina's screen and wondered why her back felt like it had ants crawling up it.

Soft murmurs from the nearby controllers, still perfectly audible to Kryslie, revealed that the men believed the craft was long gone, back into space - scared off by the approaching fighter craft.

Somehow, Kryslie did not think that was the case. The crawling feeling had not abated. Now comments that Kryslie had heard, but not consciously noted, came back into her mind - snippets on the limitations of the scanners near the ground or amongst the hills, ways to trick the sensors, older techniques that sometimes worked on high-tech cloaking shields.

"Switch to the ground radar," Kryslie said abruptly to Lexina, who gave her a rapid glance and obeyed.

"Why?"

Kryslie just said, "If they didn't go into space, they will have to land elsewhere."

"We'd see the ion trail," Lexina objected, and was then thoughtful. "No, you're right; we wouldn't if they switched back to atmosphere propulsion. Once they got high enough they could glide down again."

In the instant that Lexina stiffened, Kryslie hit the record button. The radar showed a sudden eruption, creating a patch of green on her screen like a myriad of dots. The glow wheeled away from the origin and faded out. Lexina hit the intercom button to summon an experienced controller.

Kryslie moved aside, the itch along her spine increased to unpleasant as the controller examined the record.

"Flock of birds," the man stated definitively. The attention of the nearby controllers returned to their own screens. Lexina flushed with embarrassment.

Kryslie spoke with equal firmness. "Something startled them and sent them ten kilometres from their original roost. What on the second continent would do that?"

Her voice had carried and she had the attention of the senior controllers as the man with her began to say, "With respect, Princess Kryslie, you have no training..."

Her stance didn't change, and she was about to refute the controller's belittlement of her question when she noticed Reslic approaching. He asked to view the record and then said clearly, "You make an excellent point, Princess Kryslie. Who suggested using ground radar?"

Lexina murmured respectfully, "Kryslie did, Sir."

Without moving off, Reslic used his wrist communicator to send a second flight to the coordinates of the radar contact. Then he told Kryslie and Lexina, "Good work" and strode off.

"It still might be nothing," Lexina said softly.

Kryslie shrugged, and asked, "How fast might a ship like that travel?"

"An air/space fighter?" Lexina thought about it and murmured an estimate, and she caught on to what her friend was suggesting. Doing a rough calculation in her head, based on time, speed and the distance from last sighting to the second continent she came up with an answer and saw Kryslie watching her. "You'd already worked it out."

With a shake of her head, Kryslie admitted, "Not exactly. I don't know anything about aircraft speeds. I only had an idea of the distance from place to place."

A soft voice from behind her asked, "What made you think the ship did not flee back into space?"

Kryslie turned and saw her father, waiting for her answer.

"Just a feeling - like something vile crawling over me."

"And is it possible?" Tymoros asked his niece. Lexina nodded.

“Then we will check the incident carefully. Flight two will overfly the area,” Tymoros assured the two girls. “Meanwhile, I think you youngsters have evening work to do, and the trained controllers can take over from here. Let those trained to search, do their work.”

Seeing another controller hovering politely, Lexina vacated her seat. His Majesty’s suggestion was more of a command.

Kryslie gave Lexina a grin, and departed with her father.

Long after Kryslie had done her evening after-lesson work and gone to bed, Tymoros sat pondering the evening’s events. The unannounced visit of an alien ship was cause for concern and everything necessary would be done to learn of it. Then there was his daughter, who had pointed out something obvious that the older controllers would have brushed aside.

She had experienced ‘a feeling’ like something vile crawling on her. An apt analogy for what those aliens might be planning for Tymorea. It was too nebulous to be a vision or a prophecy but he could not discount it. Kryslie was still very young, still growing into her power, but age was not a pre-requisite to receive wisdom from the Guardians of Peace. Especially if those entities had created his adopted children for a purpose...

As the Elders were beginning to see...

A purpose vital to Tymorea...

Chapter 15 - Visitor from Earth

Early one morning, five weeks after they had first taken their place in the Large lyceum, Tymos and Kryslie awoke to a low buzzing from their monitors. The green light was flashing, summoning them to the Conference Room. They dressed swiftly in the one piece suits they had come to prefer and with the empathic awareness they shared, they transmitted to their destination to arrive within moments of each other.

They bowed to their father and Governor Xyron and walked to stand beside Tymorous. He faced two men, one seated, one standing. Both of the men wore clothing of a style that seemed unusual. A whisper from Tymoros in an unfamiliar dialect enabled them to recognize the visitors.

"Hello, Dad," Tymos said quietly, moving to the seated man. Kryslie went over to him, crouched by the chair arm and hugged him tightly.

"I've missed you both," Dan Ward said. "And I am glad to see you looking so well."

"We are fine, Dad, really. And we are over what was making us obnoxious," Kryslie assured him.

"But we probably won't be going back for a while," Tymos told his natural father, gently.

"I know. Vincent and Tony Howard explained things to me and they have offered me a chance to be more than just a science teacher. They'll be able to keep me advised of your progress and I am to learn so many new things."

Finally, Tymos recalled that others were present. "Have you met our Foster Father yet?"

"I have only just arrived," Dan admitted. "And I am still muddled from the trip."

Tymos used a mixture of English and the main Tymorean dialect to introduce Dan Ward to his foster father.

"Welcome Daniel," Tymoros said graciously in English. "It is truly a pleasure to meet you. I know that the mother of your wife was my cousin."

"Thank you. I have to admit I was astounded to learn that I had kinfolk here," Dan Ward said, and then he paused. "I also wanted to meet you. It seems that I must relinquish my children to you." His voice shook slightly and his eyes glistened with moisture.

That the subject was an emotional one to the visitor was apparent, even before Tony Howard translated the words into Tymorean.

"Tonos, please tell Daniel that they will always be his children as well as mine. I have not the words in his language to express my deep gratitude."

Tony Howard translated the High King's words and added a few extra sentences of explanation.

"Dan, your children are genetically closer to him than they are to you. Not even the Elders understand why it is so, but you must believe how deeply grateful he is to have two living heirs."

Dan bowed his head in understanding.

"Ty, my brother and I are ready to discuss our plans for the Earth Mission with Daniel," Xyron took control of the gathering. "Tonos, we will need you as well."

Tymoros turned to leave, noticed Tymos and Kryslie glanced from him to their Earth father as if wondering whether to follow him or stay with Daniel. "Go with Xyron," Tymoros told them curtly. "Daniel needs you more for now."

Dan Ward was grateful for the presence of his children crowding beside him and for their arms around him. He was still recovering from the disorientation of the long-range transmission from Earth. The shorter local transmission simply added to his feeling of vertigo. However, he had to assume it was quicker than walking.

The laboratories under Xyron's control were as extensive as they were diverse. They occupied one whole level of his palace, and another two levels below the ground floor. Tymos and Kryslie were only familiar with a section of the medical laboratory; the part set up for sensitive medical monitoring. They followed Daniel on his tour of the facilities in wide-eyed silence.

The tour ended in Xyron's private laboratory. He had a corner partitioned off with some comfortable chairs, a low table and a computer terminal. Vincent went immediately to this and began a program.

A holographic screen appeared and Xyron who had remained standing began to speak. Tymos and Kryslie were sitting on the arms of Daniel's chair each with an arm around him; they said nothing but listened avidly. Tony Howard was seated close enough to be able to translate Xyron's words into English.

"Daniel, I am pleased you have decided to join us. As a native of Earth, you are in a position to be of vital help to us. You may not fully comprehend the power your children have inherited or appreciate its full extent, but the Elders of this world have foretold that they will have a mission to fulfil on Earth. For that reason, we are preparing to initiate a full base with support staff. You, as my assistant, will be the planetary coordinator of the mission and responsible for the collection and collation of data received from all the missionaries all over the planet. You must also ensure that the data is available to your children."

Xyron went into detail of his plans for the Tymorean mission mentioning the important tasks that each of the current missionaries were performing, stressing the need for absolute secrecy. The dissertation lasted for most of the morning and was presented in clear precise phrases.

Daniel was amazed that one mind could store and recall so much information and detail.

After a break for refreshments, Tony Howard and Vincent took Daniel off for his first lesson in the Tymorean advanced sciences.

Tymos and Kryslie remained perched on the armchair, as Xyron had not indicated that they were to participate further.

"Professor, can you tell us where will the base be located?" Tymos asked still considering what he had just learnt.

Xyron didn't answer immediately, he tidied up some data records before saying, "The exact location has not been decided," he said mildly, as he looked intently at them. Kryslie found she had no interest in pursuing questions about the morning's lecture even though it gave her so much new information to assimilate. Tymos sensed the will of Xyron directed at him. It occurred to him that the gift of telepathy that he and his sister shared was present in the Governors, albeit in a different form. He wanted to explore the understanding further, but he realized that it was Xyron's intention to make him forget all that he had just learnt. Irrationally he began to resist the idea with a very forceful stubbornness.

Chapter 16 - First Confrontation

Tymos strove to break the silence. "When will we get to learn how to use all the equipment?" he asked with seeming casualness. Xyron's gaze relaxed by a small amount and he perched casually on the edge of his desk.

"When the time comes for you to know, the knowledge will be yours," Xyron told him softly. "Right now the information is of no use to you. It should be stored until required as you have already forgotten your life on Earth." His statement was also a suggestion simply that Tymos should not fight him.

Kryslie understood the reason and saw the logic of it. She had no wish to resist and already the morning's lecture was hazy. It had not occurred to her to try to read the mind of a Governor. She tried it now and sensed that Xyron wanted them to forget the information until after they had mastered their power. If they failed in that mastery, having knowledge of the mission would be dangerous to its success.

Xyron passed his hand slowly across Kryslie's line of vision. Kryslie smiled then, remembering how pleasant it had been to spend time with her Earth father. Xyron then turned his full attention to Tymos who suddenly asked, "Shouldn't we start learning what we need to know for the mission?"

"There is no hurry for that. There is so much basic knowledge that you must still learn, first."

Xyron was patient. He sensed that Tymos was still resisting, but waiting to see if he realized what he was doing.

Tymos suddenly sprang up from the chair and began to stalk around the small room.

"How are you going to protect the base from detection? Who will teach the missionaries about Earth?"

Kryslie watched her brother's odd behaviour and was bewildered. His questions sounded important, but she had no clue what he was talking about.

"Come on, Krys, You heard him tell us about the mission to Earth. Don't just sit there stupidly. Back me up," Tymos yelled in his sister's direction.

Kryslie frowned, deducing that her memory of the morning was not complete. She stood slowly, worried by the turmoil in her brother's mind.

"Prince Tymos," Xyron spoke sharply.

Tymos turned to Xyron and snarled at him. "You can't make me forget. I intend to remember."

He turned suddenly and ran towards the door to the lab. Kryslie sensed his intention and reached the door first. Her brother stopped and glowered.

"Tym, what are you doing?"

"Get out of my way, Krys. I'm going to find out about this mission. We have to be ready. How can we though, if they make us forget everything?" He tried to push past his sister, but

Xyron moved quickly and caught him by the shoulders, turned him around and suggested, "Come and sit down, Prince Tymos."

Xyron's voice was hard and his manner no longer mild.

Tymos began to struggle, twisting his body violently, but he could not escape Xyron's grip.

Kryslie began to move to help her brother.

"Stay back, Princess Kryslie."

Kryslie backed away until she was against the wall. "Don't resist him, Tym. Trust him! You don't need to remember it now, truly!"

"I know, but I can't help it," Tymos told his sister, mentally. They both sensed Xyron's indomitable will.

“Allow yourself to forget,” Xyron encouraged.

“NO,” Tymos yelled

“Do you know what is happening?” Xyron asked. His grip had tightened further with Tymos’ increased struggles

“You want me to forget and I can’t. Won’t,” Tymos said hoarsely, it was part pleading and part defiance. “Let me go. LET ME GO, damn you. I can’t stand this.”

“Listen to me, Prince Tymos. You have lost control of your power! I can help you but you must not resist me. Recall to your mind the first mantra for calm.” Xyron stated clearly.

Kryslie started to approach her twin; she shared the pain Tymos felt in Xyron’s grip.

“Return to your lesson’s, Princess Kryslie. Now!”

Kryslie transmitted away immediately, but did not go to the large lyceum. Maybe she wasn’t allowed to help her twin, but she knew someone who could and she instinctively transmitted to where she sensed Tymoros to be. It didn’t matter to her that he was in the middle of receiving petitions, somewhere in the Government building.

One glance at his daughter, and Tymoros stood up, passing a pile of data pads to his brother. The man giving his petition to the king stopped speaking and glared at the young woman who had interrupted his presentation.

“My apologies, good sir. Please be assured that my brother, Prince Callen has the authority to act in my name in this matter.”

Tymoros put his arm around Kryslie and transmitted to his sanctum where he pushed his daughter into a chair.

“Tell me what the matter is,” he invited, sitting opposite her.

Between tears of helpless confusion and worry, Kryslie described her brother’s behaviour and the turmoil in his mind.

“Back to work, young one,” he told her. “I will go to Tymos.”

A part of Tymos’s mind had begun to realize what was happening. He was resisting Xyron but he could not help himself. He was a pawn to his power. It had been wrong to try to probe Xyron’s mind but now he wanted to obey the older man but he had guided his power into a path of resistance and didn’t know how to change it. His body was still struggling.

Xyron’s eyes met his for a moment. The small part of Tymos’s mind that was still aware, found itself buffeted in a maelstrom of violence, blinding light and noises both higher and lower than his normal hearing.

“I can’t stop this,” he said hoarsely. “I can’t…”

“Look into my eyes,” Xyron commanded of Tymos, who turned his eyes upward and found that he could see multiple images of Xyron looking at him, but their gazes did not lock together.

“Go back to the very basic meditation exercises we taught you,” Xyron told him. “Run through them in your mind. Concentrate.”

Tymos tried to obey. Recalling, amid the confusion, was difficult. Fragments of the first meditative chant came into his mind. He pieced them together in his mind and concentrating on the puzzle, brought about a reduction in his struggles and an easing of the light and noise in his head.

He was unaware that Tymoros and Jono Reslic had quietly entered the room.

Reslic studied Tymos, noting his actions, reading his body language and assessing the level of power in him.

“I do not think you should allow this to continue much longer, Xyron,” Reslic advised softly.

“He is still aware of me, and there is still a thread of control. His life signs are not critical,” Xyron explained.

“With his high potential, it is not the physical body that cannot contain the power but the mind. He is still so young.”

He soft voices distracted Tymos. He forgot the first mantra, as he turned to listen to the quiet voices.

An atavistic voice in his mind said the other voices were talking about him. He couldn't hear the words and he swore at the speakers, and tried once again to get free. He swore again, unaware that he had reverted for the moment to Earth English. When he was still unable to hear the words or have them stop, Tymos instinctively stilled his body and drew on some of his power to enhance his hearing.

Tymos heard his name called and turned towards that voice. He needed more of his power to distance the bright light and to focus his eyes so he could recognise his foster father. He held out his hands in a plea for help.

Tymoros took his son's hand and maintained eye contact. Tymos was trembling – trying desperately not to fight against a man he had nothing but respect for. He flinched when Tymoros placed a hand on his forehead, but after that one agonising moment, Tymos felt the fire in his veins cool and the assault of light and sound in his eyes and ears drain away into nothing. He would have fallen if Xyron not been holding him up.

Xyron eased Tymos into a chair, aware of the silent tears streaming from the boy's eyes.

"I will wait with him," Xyron offered.

Tymoros shook his head, "I'll take him back to my suite. I will take the necessary action to ensure that he has regained control. Now that he knows what can happen, he will be on guard against it happening again."

Tymoros, summoned his personal attendant, Aldiv, and instructed him to transmit the three of them to his sanctum. The attendant then arranged Tymos on a couch then departed, returning with a cup of effervescent green liquid.

While Aldiv waited discreetly by the door, Tymoros helped Tymos to sit up enough to drink from the cup.

"This will restore your energy. Unfortunately, when we have to ground out wild power, this is the effect."

Tymos felt his teeth chattering on the rim of the cup. When he had managed to drink several mouthfuls, he began to feel his body coming back to normal. He finished the drink, and then brought up one arm so that he could wipe the tears from his face on his sleeve.

"I'm sorry," Tymos managed to say. "I let you down. I couldn't ... I couldn't control it."

"Hush," Tymoros said. "You did not lose control completely. We could see that and for one with so little training – and with that much power – you have done well. Do not feel that you failed because you needed our help. What you need now is rest. We will talk again after you wake."

Even as Tymoros eased his son down, Tymos was asleep.

After covering his son with a light blanket, brought in by Aldiv, Tymoros retreated to his favourite chair, taking the opportunity for some quiet meditation.

Tymoros thought over the events just concluded and all that he had sensed. The power in Tymos had been greater than any he had felt before in a child so young. Normally, when children recently come into the second stage lost control, restraining the child until they wore themselves out was all that was needed. Rare indeed was the need to ground the excess power. That it had been needed for Tymos, meant that it would be wise to teach him the means to do it for himself – if increasing his physical activity was not enough.

There was also the sense that he had felt of the power in Tymos, ebbing and growing. It was almost as if there was a psychic influence at work.

Tymoros suddenly thought of his daughter, who had come to him for help, who had known what was happening and of the turmoil in her brother's mind.

“Perhaps that is it? A psychic bond between twins. Perhaps, she was helping him to maintain that thread of control?” Tymoros considered the idea for a while.

“Aldiv.”

“Yes, Sire.”

“Speak to who ever is supervising level zeta this afternoon. Ensure that my daughter remains fully challenged until I send a further message.”

Aldiv bowed and transmitted away.

Tymos struggled back to awareness, late in the afternoon. His mind was confused with the memories of frightening dreams.

“Tymos?”

The last vestiges of the dreams faded and he recalled where he was. He sat up quickly.

“Father, why am I here?”

“What do you remember?”

The uncomfortable flush that reddened Tymos’s face betrayed his embarrassment. The dreams had not been nightmares.

“I lost control,” Tymos admitted, shrinking back into the pillows of the couch.

“You drew on more power than you knew how to handle,” Tymoros corrected. “I had to reduce your power. You should have recovered now.”

“I don’t feel as if I have. My veins still seem to be full of fire.”

Tymoros rose and went to sit next to his son.

“Do you remember why you felt you needed to draw on so much power?”

“It seemed to me there was something I needed to learn, and I was concentrating on that. But then, I think I got angry about being thwarted. After a while, I was more frightened than angry.”

“What can you deduce from that?”

“Only what my instructors keep stressing – that we must be aware of the power of our emotions.”

“Quite right,” Tymoros agreed. “Sometimes, our emotions are all that keep us going. Now is not such a time. What else have your teachers stressed?”

“Control of ourselves,” Tymos kept his head down.

Tymoros placed his hand on his son’s arm.

“Why do you think that you failed to control yourself?”

“It just seemed like a pressure building inside me,” Tymos tried to describe what he had felt. “I had to do something to ease it.”

“As good a description as any,” Tymoros agreed. “When you feel that way again, here is what you must do...”

Tymos shivered. His father had tried to explain how to ground out excess power, but it had not helped him to do it himself. Finally, Tymoros had used his mind to give him the knowledge on a very deep level. Some of the immense strength of will possessed by the Governor was apparent to Tymos during the exchange. Tymos felt very small and helpless. However, the technique had worked. He knew how to drain away excess power from himself at will.

Now, though, he had to go to Professor Governor Xyron and apologise for his behaviour. That at least was the right thing to do. Then, he had to present himself to the President Governor – for extra training. His father had implied that he had been beyond merely rude to both Governors. He was certain that he would lose his personal freedom for weeks, they would deny him the evening contact with his friends, the time to continue his personal study of Vulcanology that fascinated him. He felt afraid that he would not be able to tolerate it and was angry with himself for having to.

Tymoros watched silently. He sensed the power building again and wondered if Tymos was aware of it. He nodded to himself as he saw Tymos become still and the power level dropping.

Aldiv re-entered the room unsummoned.

“Your majesty, there is a delegation from Ecla that needs to speak to you. Prince Callen sent me to say that the matter is urgent.”

Tymoros felt the need to be in two places.

“I will present myself to President Reslic, Father,” Tymos decided stoically.

With a gentle arm squeeze of encouragement, Tymoros rose.

“Aldiv, assist Prince Tymos to Governor Reslic, and then attend me in the audience Hall.”

Late in the day, after the evening meal, Tymos joined his sister and friends in the High King’s suite. He managed a brief ‘Hi’ to Jonko and Keleb, but he did not feel like talking. He sent a mental, “I’m okay” in answer to his sister’s look of concern but kept himself tightly shielded even from her. He muttered, “Thank you Krys!” when only she could hear. Kryslic didn’t have to ask what for - she knew.

Jonko and Keleb knew some of what had happened. They had decided to return with Kryslic to offer whatever support and encouragement they could. Jonko smiled at Tymos, and he managed a faint return grin.

“I wondered why our worthy instructor, Perrin Reslic, gave us a lecture on how perilous is our control in the early days of the second stage,” Jonko commented.

Keleb added, “I had the distinct feeling that that the three of us there that were born on an alien world, would find it hard to gain mastery.”

“I think it makes it easier,” Tymos said softly. “They had to give us special training to make us aware of our power and because we are – alien – we can never take it for granted.”

“So what happened?” Jonko demanded.

Tymos didn’t answer at once. Kryslic could sense both his reluctance to discuss it and his resolve that he should.

“I very nearly lost control totally. I had so much power in me that - I could have destroyed the room or worse. Father grounded out the power. Later, he showed me how to do it myself, and then President Reslic corrected certain other deficiencies in my training along with telling me to return to see him each evening for a week.”

Jonko had a thoughtful expression on his face as he looked from Tymos to Kryslic.

“How convenient, Kryslic received the very same invitation.”

Tymos, until then aware only of his own sense of embarrassment, glanced at his sister.

Kryslic grinned maliciously.

“It didn’t take a genius to figure out what was up. I saw Aldiv talking to Perrin Reslic, about halfway through our session this afternoon. Right after that, he decides that it is my turn for some concentrated coaching. Mostly he was pitching his skill to my level but every time he thought my attention was wondering – he knocked me down. I swear I will have an enviable collection of bruises tomorrow.”

“Seriously, they didn’t want you helping me,” Tymos said.

“I know.”

“I felt your support!”

Kryslic chuckled. “I knew you’d be alright and I knew that you had to do things yourself, but if it was me, just knowing you were there would help a lot.”

Keleb interrupted. “It wasn’t fun, was it?”

“No, it wasn’t,” Tymos admitted.

Keleb shook his head. “I thought so. You two are uncanny. I bet, that when you were having your chat with the President, was when Krys was being a real trial to the President’s brother.”

“I believe the words ‘undisciplined whelp’ were mentioned,” Jonko murmured with a grin.

“Kryslie!”

“Well, brother, they wanted to keep my mind off you, as if they could, so I was merely distracting myself.”

“I don’t think ‘undisciplined’ is a description you should aim for,” Tymos warned.

“That wasn’t undisciplined,” Kryslie said sobering. “That was me saying that no one is allowed to separate us and they can think again if they try.”

Chapter 17 - Enforced Lesson

Tymos and Kryslie walked in silence from their father's suite on their way to their own apartments. It had been a very long day; both were exhausted and feeling sore all over and didn't feel they had the personal energy to transmit safely and hoped walking would help them unwind. They were not expecting trouble.

Without warning, two figures materialised in front of them; human figures, clad in all black with only eye, nose and mouth slits apparent in the costume.

As one, Kryslie and Tymos pressed the disc on their monitors to summon help, even as they spun around looking for an escape route. Instead of seeing Morov and Delia behind them, they saw two more dark clad figures. Before they could do any more, one of the figures caught Tymos from behind, controlling him with an extremely painful grip. His agony shocked through Kryslie, numbing her mind and making her an easy victim for another of the intruders.

"Let me go," Kryslie yelled as loud as she could, but the pressure on her arms didn't slacken. A third figure walked around to face her. He didn't speak, but a gesture brought the fourth figure into view, and that one carried two light aluminium staves and passed them to the one facing Kryslie. He threw one to her as the figure holding her released her. She caught it instinctively.

Even without verbal instructions, the intention was clear. She had to fight. It occurred to her that the choice of weapon was not mere chance. She was learning to use the staves for attack and defence and she was certain that these four intruders were some of the training instructors. However, that knowledge would not help her at all. Moreover, if it were true, there would be no help coming.

The dark clad opponent attacked, forcing Kryslie to parry it while allowing for the narrow confines of the passage. Awkwardly at first, Kryslie fought back. She sensed the rhythm in the movements and worked with it, preparing to launch an attack of her own. Then just as she was about to land a debilitating blow on her opponent, she felt another rush of agony from her twin. A painful blow landed on her hip, three or four more blows landed in quick succession on arms and legs and even as she spun and tried to protect herself, she tripped on a staff positioned between her feet and fell face down on top of her weapon. She twisted, trying to get up and saw the staff coming at her head and moved just in time, so it only scraped her cheek. Then a weight landed on her back kept her down.

"Do you yield?" her opponent asked. She recognised the voice of Perrin Reslic.

Kryslie had no choice but to agree. "Yes."

The next voice she knew as well. "Do you still think being wide open to your twin is a good idea?" President Reslic asked her in a voice as hard as stone.

There was only one truthful answer to that. "No."

The weight on her back lifted and the figure moved away.

"Get up," Reslic ordered.

When Kryslie had made it to her feet without help, she saw that Tymos was no longer being held and only Jono Reslic was with them in the passage. He had removed his mask to reveal his impassive face.

"Consider this lesson carefully, Princess Kryslie. We will discuss it next evening."

Reslic strode off and Tymos who had been leaning against the wall, pushed himself upright, and tried not to feel like he had been wrenched out of his shape.

Delia and Morov approached quietly and transmitted them to their individual apartments.

Kryslie was slightly defiant when she accompanied her brother to their appointment with President Reslic next evening. She knew she was in for trouble, even though she had tried very

hard to hide her resentment at the previous evenings 'lesson' when Perrin Reslic had taken level Zeta for the afternoon drill.

Tymos walked in silence. His loss of control the previous day and the session with the President afterwards were still vivid in his mind. He had received a serious lesson in controlling his emotions.

They activated the chime on the door of the President's private sanctum and were admitted by Yeven.

Kryslie saw Perrin Reslic standing beside his brother the President and the dual regard nearly paralysed her. It was only the well-instilled sense of protocol that propelled her inwards. She sensed that Tymos had stayed by the door, but did not turn around to confirm it.

"Tell me the reasons for your behaviour yesterday," President Reslic asked with his usual directness.

"I wanted to help my brother," Kryslie answered, meeting his gaze.

"Do you consider that a good reason for your undisciplined behaviour?" Perrin Reslic asked sharply.

"He was hurting! Like you were hurting him last night."

"What good did you do him last evening?" Perrin Reslic asked.

"You weren't fighting fairly."

"If we were truly assassins, we would not fight fair," Perrin Reslic reminded her. "And you would be dead."

"I knew who you were," Kryslie told them.

"And that makes it alright?"

Kryslie refrained from answering. Her resentment from the previous day simmered in her mind.

Jono Reslic studied Kryslie's expression and stance for a while, and then gave his brother a glance. Perrin Reslic left the room.

"Your loyalty to your twin is commendable and the bond between you is a great strength. However – it is also your greatest weakness. As things are now, killing one of you will incapacitate the other. Two for one stroke. Can you see that?"

Kryslie could, but she did not want to admit it, so she said nothing.

"Come!"

Jono Reslic stood and walked to the door that led to his private gymnasium. Kryslie noticed that Tymos was no longer in sight. She let her mind reach out for him but felt nothing.

What she did see was all her other classmates faced off against level alpha students and the older students were not sparing their partners. The gap in skill was all too apparent.

"You and your brother are all that can help your friends," Reslic told her, picking up two of the aluminium staves and passing one to her.

Kryslie knew he was serious and felt sick in her stomach. Instinctively, she reached for her brother's mind, and tried harder to reach his and then she felt his pain. While this distracted her, she was unprepared for Reslic to attack. She woke up to the full rules of the encounter when a solid blow landed on her shin.

"You have to block Tymos out of your mind," Reslic told her as he continued his assault and watched her fumble into a defensive stance. "You will need all your concentration to disable me, before you can help him."

"How can I possibly do that?" Kryslie protested, hurting from the multiple strikes from her opponents' staves and knowing that Reslic was the greatest living warrior on the planet.

"You have to. Your brother and your friends are depending on you."

Reslic never varied the strength of his attack. He knew exactly how hard he was making his blows. Those that connected would hurt, but not break bones.

Kryslie fought back tears. She hurt all over and her attempts at attack were becoming weaker. She was trembling with the exertion. With a flick of his staff, Reslic tripped her.

“Five minutes,” he told her. “You are missing the point. Do you trust your brother’s skills?”

From the floor, Kryslie nodded. “He’s better than me at this.”

“Do you need to fight his battle too?”

“No.”

“So why are you?”

“He’s hurting.”

“Your friends will be hurt too. Only you can end this.”

Kryslie forced herself to stand, before the five minutes were up. She reached down for her stave and stood ready.

She saw a flicker of approval on Reslic’s face before the duel began again.

More for her own benefit, she thought at her brother, “I can do this, Tym, don’t worry about me.”

This time, she concentrated on her own battle and once again, she found the rhythm of her opponents movements, prepared a counter attack but was ready for the sudden change in rhythm and blocked the blow. The success of her defence encouraged her. She began to acquit herself better. Fewer attacks were getting through her defence and one of her attacks actually scored on her opponent.

“Your friends are losing,” Reslic told her, succeeding in distracting her attention.

Kryslie glanced at the end of the small gym and saw he was right. Keleb was down on the floor and Lexina was climbing to her feet. Guilt at causing this punishment on them caused her to falter.

“Concentrate!” Reslic reminded her, with a solid swipe to her shin.

Kryslie obeyed. She was tired and hurting, but she had to keep going, had to end it.

She felt a surge of pain from her brother; it made her angry. She pressed forward with another attack of her own, forcing Reslic back. He parried with a move designed to trip her, She allowed herself to fall and turned her momentum into a roll, and attacked Reslic from behind. He quickly turned and parried, but his eyes gleamed with approval.

“Cease!” Reslic held out his hand for her stave.

Kryslie had stopped and was trying to allow her breathing to return to a resting rate.

“Find your brother.”

Kryslie found new energy and raced out, glancing around as she ran and following an instinctive direction. She had an idea of the layout of Reslic’s palace; it wasn’t too different to her Father’s palace. Therefore, she made for where she expected stairs to be and found them. Her instinct was telling her that Tymos was up there. She ran up the stairs, her mind busy seeking for her brother. As she reached the top step, she felt something solid between her ankles and was too late to stop herself falling backwards. Instinctively, she rolled into a ball and although collecting more bruises as she rolled down the stairs, she was able to stand up at the bottom and glare at her assailant.

“Fool,” Konn Reslic taunted, not moving from his position. He was there to stop her passing.

Kryslie suddenly laughed and transmitted past him. He saw her rematerialise, but he did not move from his position. He let Kryslie race off.

Caution became her priority. Instead of racing to help her brother, she moved forward slowly, looking around as she went. That was how she spotted the next black clad ‘ambusher’.

“I can see you, Gann,” Kryslie called out.

Gann emerged fully from his hiding place and smiled a mirthless grin. “You still have to get past me.”

Kryslie ran towards him, watching as he moved his stave to block her. She did something unexpected and curled into a ball and rolled under the swing of his stave. Rising, she pushed him off balance, and then ran on towards her brother. She spotted Tymos just as he pressed forward an attack that disarmed his opponent.

“Enough,” Perrin Reslic instructed. “We are to return to the gym.”

Kryslie briefly touched her brother’s mind and felt the touch returned. She knew that her brother was as exhausted as she felt. Neither objected to letting the older man transmit them back and they both collapsed to sit on the floor when they got there.

Their arrival was a signal for the level alpha students to cease sparring with the other level Zeta students and offer their younger opponents a hand up if they were on the floor and words of commendation on their skill.

“Level Alpha, well done. Now help your opponents to the infirmary. Level Zeta, also well done, but there is to be no slacking off tomorrow,” Jono Reslic directed.

As the younger students walked out, they glanced at Tymos and Kryslie. Stenn winked; making sure his father couldn’t see it.

At Perrin Reslic’s urging, Tymos and Kryslie found the energy to walk back into the President’s sanctum and collapse into two chairs. From a side table, he collected two cups of the restorative drink and handed one to each of the High King’s children.

Jono Reslic arrived a few minutes later and took his chair behind his desk.

“Are you willing to listen now, Princess Kryslie?”

Kryslie nodded wearily.

“You both did well. Very well,” he commended. “You each managed to block out the other. What else did you learn?”

“I learnt not to pick fights with people bigger than me,” Kryslie said, then added, “Sir.”

Reslic smiled faintly.

“And that I should keep my wits about me, and I can fight better without the emotional baggage.”

“Prince Tymos?”

“I did what you showed me,” Tymos said. “I was still aware of Kryslie and her condition, but I trusted her to do her bit. I did manage to hold my own but I couldn’t finish until I felt Kryslie in my mind.”

Reslic nodded. “Tomorrow, I will teach you both some more mental exercises and some other ways to shield your mind. If you care to remain for a while tonight, I will teach you some biofeedback techniques to control pain. It could prove useful in the future.”

Two people in the room decided that the future was right then.

Chapter 18 - Expectations

“Wake up, Princess Kryslie!”

Delia shook her charge gently, then more vigorously.

“Wha...?”

“You must wake up. You are being summoned.”

Kryslie opened one eye, glanced at the timepiece and groaned.

“It’s still the middle of the night!”

“It is only an hour before your normal waking up time and you are required in the Conference Room.”

Kryslie did not want to move. Every muscle seemed to be stiff and sore from the lesson the previous evening. Her eyes felt as if they wanted to stay closed. Not surprising, considering the very late hour when she had finally fallen asleep.

With another groan, Kryslie sat up and swung her legs around to hang over the edge of the bed. While she practiced the pain blocking technique, Delia took the opportunity to brush Kryslie’s hair. The day’s clothes were waiting in a neat pile on a chair.

“I wish I had time for another of your massages,” Kryslie commented to Delia. “Though that would probably put me back to sleep. And President Reslic made it very clear that we were not allowed to slack off today. I wish – I didn’t have to go to this meeting.”

“It’s your duty as Heir Designate,” Delia chided.

“What about my privileges as Heir Designate? I’m a Princess and I am not even allowed to sleep in occasionally.”

“It’s your responsibility to learn all you can about what is happening in the world. Either you or your brother will succeed your father...”

“As far as I am concerned, the lowest apprentice gardener has more responsibility than I do,” Kryslie complained.

“That won’t always be the case,” Delia said primly.

“What’s the point anyway? Has there ever been a High Queen?”

Delia pursed her lips. “There has been a Queen Regent.”

“Big deal! Do you think I will have time for breakfast this morning?”

“You will be unacceptably late to this meeting if you don’t hurry.”

“Darned if I care!”

“Do you think it wise to provoke your elders today, Mistress? Particularly in light of your lesson yesterday?”

“Stop preaching, Delia.”

Delia noticed her mistress’s increased activity and said no more.

Kryslie arrived, as usual, within moments of her twin.

She grinned at her brother and heard in her mind, “How are you?”

“Well enough,” Kryslie grimaced as she thought her reply. “I dare say I got no more than I deserved and enough to get me to admit to the point. What about you?”

“A few more bruises,” Tymos shrugged.

They stopped communicating after the amplified request for all in attendance to come to order. Tymos and Kryslie found seats immediately behind their father in the outer row of seating. Tymos glanced at them before taking his own seat.

Kryslie slumped into hers and wriggled, trying to get comfortable but she was sore in too many places. Shifting her weight caused her seat to creak faintly. It seemed though that no matter how she moved, something hurt and she needed to renew her mental pain blocking. If asked, she could not have said what the speakers were saying.

Tymos was at least able to pay attention, so that when asked for comments, he could answer for both of them. He hoped that he could shield his sister from more trouble.

Tymoros noticed the signs of inattention, but said nothing until there was a break in proceedings.

“Krys, they’ve found mutants in the hills and signs of aliens,” Tymos whispered quickly. “The second scout group will be returning and a party of the Tymorean Peace Corps will be going to do a thorough search of the area.”

“Good of you to bring your sister up to date, Tymos,” the High King said as he stood up and turned to face his children.

Tymos paled and Kryslie looked at her feet to hide a blush. Tymoros lifted her face up and studied her expression.

“Kryslie, I would like you to go and have a talk with your foster mother. You will find her in the nursery.”

Kryslie opened her mouth to protest, but Tymoros interrupted.

“Tymos can tell you all you need to know.”

“I’m not a child to be sent from the room! I just couldn’t get comfortable,” Kryslie objected in a low voice.

“Go to your mother. While you are there, I advise you to lose all the resentment you are nursing, or you will find yourself in trouble all day.”

With a muffled expletive, Kryslie strode away from her father and transmitted to the nursery.

Kryslie chose to arrive in the large day room, empty at that early hour. She recognised Tanya’s voice coming from a smaller side room and she walked in that direction.

As she entered the room, a baby began to cry. Soon, a second child echoed its exact tones.

“Kryslie,” Tanya greeted her warmly. “I didn’t expect you here. Isn’t there a meeting in the conference room?”

“Yes, but father sent me here as if I was a naughty child!”

Tanya understood; her foster daughter’s mood was obvious to her.

“Can you give me a hand for a moment?” she asked.

“Yes, of course,” Kryslie agreed. She had no argument with Tanya, who was a serene presence, glowing with health and now obviously pregnant.

Tanya picked up one of the crying babies and handed the wrapped bundle to Kryslie.

She was tentative about the task at first, because the child immediately began to scream louder. However, she copied Tanya’s example and walked around, gently patting the child’s back and rocking from side to side. The crying eased off, and then stopped.

“Come and sit down,” Tanya invited. “These two are teething at the moment and will settle better being held. Then you can tell me what is making you so angry.”

Kryslie found it easy to unburden her festering resentments to one that knew the value of actively listening without interrupting.

“They have to be hard,” Tanya said when Kryslie had stopped talking. “Sometimes they even have to inflict the ultimate punishment. There might come a time when you must. An Heir Designate can often represent the Governors.”

“I won’t be like them!” Kryslie vowed.

“It is to your credit that you think that way,” Tanya commended. “You haven’t had any experience of life outside the estate – no listen ...”

Tanya put her free hand on Kryslie’s arm.

“I was born a commoner. I grew up in Delf, one of the cities. For the most part, the people in the cities are prosperous and peaceful, but there are the occasional malcontents that delight in causing trouble and the rare murderer. When you are older, after you have reached level Delta of

course, you will be able to travel to the cities and towns. In the absence of higher authority, you would be asked to judge such people.”

“Tymos and I have no authority,” Kryslie complained. “Every one on this estate seems to have more than we do.”

“It may seem that way, but you and your brother are very important – to the world, to your father, to me and to everyone.”

Kryslie snorted quietly, not intending to be rude.

“Tymoros, as High King, must have heirs or the stability of the world is threatened. We can’t put you and your brother at risk or let you risk yourselves. Hence your attendants, the constant attention and the emphasis on you acting with thought and caution.”

The utter conviction and sincerity of her foster mother’s words overcome some of the conflicting resentments of that constant supervision and continuous pressure from her teachers.

“Soon enough, you will have a brother or sister. One who is already kicking strongly.”

Tanya paused, as the child within her increased its activity.

“Xyron has thirteen children, Jono has eleven. The lad you are holding is his youngest.”

“Is that why they are pushing us so hard?” Kryslie asked.

“No, they are pushing you as hard as you are capable of learning – for your own sake.”

Some time later, when Kryslie was again, settling the fretful child, she felt a hand on her shoulder. She jumped, before recognising the sense of her father.

“Young Ennis Reslic,” Tymoros recognised, causing Kryslie to look at him in amazement.

“How about putting him back in his cot and joining me for breakfast?”

Kryslie nodded and as she was settling the child, she heard her father asking after the other children in the room by name.

“It occurs to me,” Tymoros said when Kryslie rejoined him, “that you and Tymos should have some responsibility.”

Tymos, who was talking to Tanya, heard his name mentioned and looked up.

“One of the earliest lessons in discipline is the morning inspection. Follow!”

His meaning became clear as the King walked through the dormitories for each age group. Tymoros greeted each child by name and the King spoke to them in turn, praising or chiding as required. The children that slept in the nursery area were expected to have their bed and possessions tidy, whilst the children who slept with their parents but stayed in the nursery during the day were required to be neatly presented.

Mostly, the children in the nursery were too young to be having lessons in the small lyceum, though a small number of older children whose parents were missionaries did sleep there. These already knew them. All heard that the High Kings children, Prince Tymos and Princess Kryslie would be presiding at future morning inspections.

When the High King and his consort and children were back in their suite having breakfast, Tymoros spoke to Kryslie. “I sense you are more relaxed now.”

Kryslie looked up and saw no trace of censure in her foster father’s expression.

“Yes, I guess I am.”

“Do you wish to discuss your concerns?”

Kryslie was not sure that she wanted to. She shrugged. “I don’t know why but I just felt like I was being pushed around too much. Sometimes I just want to slack off and do something I want to do.”

“And now?” Tymoros prompted.

“Tanya explained some things to me. I will accept what she said as truth, even if I still don’t understand why. I mean, she says we are important, but I can’t see it. We weren’t even born here. Our instructors keep telling us we are too ignorant, too inexperienced, and too young – and then they seem to be pushing us all the time. Just us, not the rest of our level. I assumed it was

because we came here when we were adolescent, but Jonko and Keleb are older than we are – and no one is pushing them, so what’s the rush?”

Tymoros was not going to tell his children what the Elders saw in their future.

“You are my heirs, and in a position to need to learn a great deal more than your fellows,” was all he said.

“Then why do I feel, sometimes, that we know more than the teachers on some subjects?” Kryslie finished.

“Perhaps we could test that feeling,” Tymoros suggested.

Kryslie didn’t react to the suggestion, just glanced at her brother and sighed. She had probably just let herself in for more strife.

Tymoros finished his breakfast and stood up. He walked over to a computer terminal and called up some data. He studied the screen for a while, and then quickly flicked through several more screens of data.

“There may be some merit in your comments,” Tymoros said thoughtfully. “I will suggest that your level be tested to see if any of you are ready to graduate up. However, it is time to go to your lessons now.”

The students of level Zeta were hard at work and were the only occupants of the large tiered hall. On this day, rather than sitting together on one of the lowest tiers, they spread out throughout the hall so that each could complete the series of tests on all of the subjects they had covered. If they did well enough they would graduate to the next higher level. Some of the number had only been there matter of weeks; others had been there for months. Not all would be ready to graduate after the testing.

The tests required proof of knowledge and use of logical thinking and they had the whole morning to complete them. However, halfway through the morning Tymos and Kryslie as well as Stenn had already finished.

Stenn Reslic put down his light pen and computer pad then looked around. The timepiece showed ten o’clock, so there were two hours before any of the instructors would return. He wouldn’t be able to use the terminals for private study of his structured basics; the instructors locked them out during testing.

He grinned wryly at himself. He had been annoyed when his father had insisted that he have extra lessons, but that was before he realised how fast Tymos was learning. Now, his aim was to keep up with his cousins. He had spent two idle years in level Theta and he’d gone into level Zeta after only six months in level Eta, and now he might be going up again in a similar time period. Well, his father ought to be impressed.

Thinking about his friends, Stenn glanced around. Tymos seemed to have finished. He’d put his pen down and was staring into space. Kryslie seemed to be fidgeting. Stenn wanted to fidget too. He liked to be busy, and seldom found himself with nothing to do. He wished he could go outside.

He thought back to the morning’s instructions. Nothing had been said about staying there once they’d finished and put their computer pads in the reader slots. All they were told had been that they had until twelve o’clock to submit the work.

Without conscious decision, Stenn began to edge his way around the room until he was in the tier just behind Kryslie.

“Psst!”

Kryslie looked around.

“I’ve finished, and I don’t want to sit around for two hours with nothing to do. We could keep ourselves usefully busy if we went outside and practiced that last tortuous exercise my father devised. Our teachers will be tied up until at least noon and we can be back by then.”

“No,” Kryslie said at once. She still felt the passionate conviction of Tanya’s reasons for them not to put themselves in danger. She said as much to Stenn.

“What danger?” Stenn asked. “True, every group usually has guards, but I have never heard of any time when they have been needed. Out there we can be busy, in here our minds are idle – isn’t that a greater danger?”

Kryslie felt the skin on the back of her neck prickle. Suddenly, she felt the need to be outside.

“Alright, then.”

Tymos sensed his sister’s approach and dropped out of a light meditative trance.

“What are you doing, Kryslie?”

She told him, and used the arguments Stenn had given her, adding, “Rather than being open to alien thoughts.”

“You’re right,” Tymos finally agreed.

“We can find a quiet spot in the gardens,” Stenn added, coming up next to them.

The three of them transmitted to the front of the room to submit their tests, then again to a paved area outside the large lyceum. They all glanced around, then Stenn urged, “Come on.”

He led them carefully around, past his father’s palace, avoiding servants walking from their residence to their workplace, into the thicket of trees between the lyceum and the servant’s garden. They saw another group of students and the associated guards and instructor and edged closer to the isolation building. Kryslie suddenly grabbed Stenn and whispered a warning as she pulled him deeper into a small grove of trees. “They have put guards around the Isolation Building.”

She indicated through the trees where the brown clad guards could be seen patrolling.

“I wonder what is going on.” Stenn whispered intently. “I didn’t hear Father mention anything.”

Tymos recognized the look of daring on his friends face.

“It is not our concern!” he warned his friend. “If we pass close to your father’s palace we can still reach the Palace Gardens unseen. We can go and find a quiet spot away from the other levels.”

“Where’s your sense of adventure?” Stenn challenged.

“On hold,” Kryslie told him firmly. “Having your father prove to me how untrained I am, once in a week is enough.”

The trio moved further away from the patrolling guards and went in search of a suitable place to exercise. They saw a group of Level Gamma students and observed them for a time, remaining hidden from the two guards assigned to that part of the garden. They slipped into the tree barrier in front of the guard barracks and came suddenly upon a small group of six Level Alpha students. The students were facing away from them and were comparing of flora specimens. The three observers quietly slipped behind three trees. When they moved again, they were seen.

“Stenn!” a sharp voice spoke. “Come out at once!”

Stenn caught Tymos’s gaze and pulled a pained expression. They both recognized the voice of Gann Reslic, the most senior student. Stenn gestured for the others to stay put. He put his hands in his pockets and strolled out into his brother’s view with a carefully neutral expression on his face.

“The rest of you too!” Gann insisted.

Tymos and Kryslie emerged slowly recognizing the authority of the senior student.

“Why are you here?” Gann demanded, looking at his brother.

“We had finished the test. We thought that we could spend the time more usefully out here, practicing our lessons. We were looking for a quiet spot.”

“So why were you creeping from tree to tree?” Gann countered sharply.

“We didn’t want to disturb you!” Stenn said trying to look innocent. Gann was not impressed.

“You should know better!” Gann told him annoyed. “You know I’ll have to speak to father about this!”

Stenn shrugged pretending to be unconcerned.

Gann spoke to his fellow students. “See they stay here until I return.” He transmitted away. Two of the brown clad guards moved closer, watching, but not interfering.

“You may as well sit down,” one of the remaining students suggested. “It may be a long wait.”

“Maybe I should have let you speak,” Stenn whispered as he settled himself on the ground. “You two out rank him. He would have had to let us keep going.”

“Wouldn’t work,” Tymos countered. “He is senior student and we have no authority over anyone except the children in the nursery.”

“Sorry, then. I’ll tell Dad it was my idea.” Stenn suddenly chuckled quietly.

“If it was just me, Gann would’ve thumped me and dragged me back. He is such a stickler for rules. He won’t like interrupting Dad in conference.”

Neither, Kryslie nor Tymos found the idea amusing.

They wished intently that they could return to the lyceum, but as long as they were under the watchful eyes of the senior students, there was no leaving the gardens.

The time spent sitting on the grass waiting for judgment passed slowly, almost unbearably. Finally, after about half an hour, Gann returned.

To his brother he said. “Father wishes to see you, Stenn. He expects you at once.”

Tymos and Kryslie were told, “You are to return to the lyceum and wait until you are summoned.”

The summons came from Tymoros and he was waiting for them in his private sanctum. His manner was severe, and he kept them standing at attention. They had never seen him in this mood before.

“Your test results were extremely good,” he said coming straight to the point. “Academically you are ready to graduate to Level Epsilon. However, your lapse of discipline this morning indicates that you have not reached the degree of maturity required for the higher level. You did not have permission to leave before noon. It was intended that you would be fully occupied all morning. You could have put a lot more thought into the philosophical questions.”

“I stopped when my mind started thinking in circles,” Kryslie admitted. “I was feeling restless and felt I needed to be out and physically active.”

Tymoros turned his thoughtful gaze onto Tymos.

“I agreed because I have had it emphasised to me that we need to keep our minds busy,” Tymos supported his sister.

After a moment of consideration, Tymoros spoke again.

“There was a very important reason for keeping you busy until noon and for the extra security in the grounds. Your wanderings nearly put you into grave danger. Yes, the guards noticed your proximity to the isolation buildings! A small group of mutants arrived here today. The guards escorted them to the isolation building for evaluation. While I have a great deal of pity for these people, they are all unstable and many are mentally unbalanced. Had they managed to escape they would have had no hesitation in destroying you to ensure their freedom.”

“I’m sorry, Father,” Kryslie said looking away from him. “I noticed the extra guards but I never considered why.”

“We are so used to having guards and attendants around,” Tymos started to explain, but Tymoros cut him off.

“Will I need to insist that your teachers are more specific in their instructions?” Tymoros asked. His children flushed uncomfortably, trying not to resent the implication that they needed to be treated as if they were still in the Small lyceum.

“No, Sir,” Tymos assured him blushing and wishing he had trusted his instincts and insisted that they all stayed in the Large lyceum. It only then occurred to him that no group of students was ever completely alone in the various gardens during study hours. Attendants, guards or a teacher were always around; so what were they being guarded against?

“We have decided that you will complete a detention program before we allow you to go to the higher level. It will test your present capabilities to the utmost. You will begin this evening. And you will consider yourself restricted to walking, not using your transmitters.”

Tymos and Kryslie spoke together, “Yes, Father.”

Sensing his disappointment in them, they waited for his dismissal.

“That is all I am going to say on the matter.” Tymoros said sternly. “You may go!”

Chapter 19 - Defence Plans

During the four days since the mutants had come to the estate, Tymos and Kryslie rarely saw their father. He was up before dawn and returned late.

One morning before breakfast, Kryslie thought to ask Tanya if she knew where he was.

“I don’t know exactly,” Tanya admitted. “He is trying to help the mutants and find out what they know.”

Tanya, who was rearranging some of the tapestry cushions, shuddered. “I know it is his duty to help them, but they hate anyone with Royal Power. They blame us for their being like they are – hideous, outcast, and unstable. Anyway, they are in the isolation building, in rooms as well appointed as our own but they still refuse to cooperate. There are things Ty won’t tell me. It is probably that he doesn’t wish to upset me...oomph.”

“What’s wrong?” Tymos asked in mild alarm.

“This child seems to kick much harder when you two are around.”

“Really? Can I feel him?”

Tanya put Tymos’s hand on her skirt where the kicking was fiercest. A grin spread across his face as the kicking centred on where his hand was. Then Tymos felt the touch of his sister’s mind, even as she directed a thought at the unborn child.

“Don’t be too impatient to be born, little one, stay there, rest, grow big and strong.”

Tymos felt then, a formless awareness. He glanced at Kryslie, who nodded. The child was aware of them. Tymos sent the feeling of love and acceptance.

“Prince Tymos.”

“Princess Kryslie.”

The two children turned from Tanya to see their attendants and the two security men assigned to guard them. Tymos seemed to ignore the latter as he met the gaze of his attendant.

“What is it Morov?”

“You and Princess Kryslie are required to attend an emergency session of the Council.”

Tymos felt a shiver of premonition. He had no need to ask if his sister had too.

“Will our teachers this morning be advised of our commitment?”

“They are aware of the meeting,” Morov confirmed.

Even though they were well able to transmit themselves to the conference room, Tymos and Kryslie were still restricted from using their transmitters and so allowed their attendants to take them there. The attendants and guards withdrew as Aldiv, the High King’s attendant, called for the attention of all in the room.

The Governors sat at the head of the table, all the other attendees found seats according to the protocol of rank. Closest to the Governor’s were the Elders, grey haired men and women, then the senior government officials and their deputies, the palace departmental leaders and their assistants and finally any of the children of the Governor’s who were available to attend.

The group settled with remarkable speed, the quiet babble of voices stilled, as Professor Xyron rose to speak. His eldest son was standing by to operate the data projector. His words caught the attention of every one in the room.

“Our scout patrol has found evidence that an alien ship landed in the mountains and departed again. Artefacts of alien origin were found in sector 72. Whilst searching for any aliens that stayed on our world, the patrol located a colony of mutants and captured those who tried to ambush them.”

Tymos continued the report. “Questioning of the mutants has provided little useful information. However, we are certain that not all the aliens left our world. It is also certain that

the aliens and the mutants are allies, which means that all the people on our world are in danger.”

One of the Elders stood, and received a nod to speak.

“The Elders of Tymorea have been granted a vision of a great conflict to come. The alien influence is very clear and it is clear to us that we must win back the loyalty of the mutants. With their aid, the aliens can work by subterfuge to weaken us and destroy our defences and safe guards thus endangering all people common and royalty alike.”

The Elder sat down and Reslic stood.

“We have a plan of action, and everyone here has a role to play. The Tymorean Peace Corps will be taking messages to all district leaders. The leaders are to pass the message to all the towns and villages in their jurisdiction. They are to look out for strangers or strange activity and report any instances to their leaders who will report to us. The leaders will have orders to activate the civilian militia, and will have the task of apprehending anyone caught in acts of sabotage...”

The President detailed the entire plan and finally came to the evacuation plan for the royal estate. Each Department head, received a copy of the plan, to read and memorise. They were referred to one of Reslic’s deputies if they had questions. The palace senior staff had their roles explained to them and were instructed to ensure all their subordinates understood them. These people departed, and the President outlined the duties of the estate security in the event of an attack.

Finally, he turned to the youngest attendees.

The final matter for discussion involved the safety of all the estate personnel particularly the Royal Children should an invasion be imminent.

“As children of the Governors, you will be responsible for all the younger children and their attendants. In the event of an invasion, your duty is to lead them all to safety in the city of Dira.”

“How do we get there,” Harron, Xyron’s fourth son, asked.

“You will be taught to operate the long range transmitter beam,” Xyron assured him. “Gann, if you would?”

Gann beckoned the younger students and then led them down passages and stairs to the lowest level of Xyron’s Palace. He took them into a room where the floor had a circular tile mosaic, with the design of the Triumvirate Governors of Tymorea. He went over to a metal cabinet and opened the door.

“This is a long range beam generator,” Gann began in a bored tone. “This unit is only activated when needing to travel between here and the main unit below.”

He pushed buttons and a glowing terminus of mauve light appeared above the tile mosaic.

“That is the terminus of the long-range beam. It is currently set to take people down to the level of the tunnels. Jacen will go first. All you do is walk into the terminus and use your transmitter.”

Jacen, who was another level alpha student, grinned and transported away.

“The rest of you go one by one,” Gann stated. He watched and followed the last of the younger students.

When the group was all assembled again, Gann continued his teaching monotone. The purple beam terminus disappeared. They had arrived on a mosaic design that was identical to the one in the room above.

The most obvious features of the circular chamber where the group had reassembled, was the sealed rock wall with three circular openings. A machine pointed at one of them.

“This is also a long range beam generator,” Gann went on. “It is kept in stand-by mode, so that people can use it to travel to the two nearest cities or to the farmlands. It runs on electricity, which is stored in batteries charged by wind or solar power. This unit swivels to face the direction you wish to go. If you wanted to, you could walk along the tunnels to the cities.”

“What if there’s a rock fall?” Harron asked.

“There never has been!” Gann said flatly. “But the beam will work through a certain amount of matter – more than your transmitter will.”

“How do you turn it on?” Tymos asked.

Gann showed them the start up switch and the switch to go from standby to full operation.

“Here is the switch that lets you choose between Reva, Dira and the farmlands. Therefore, when you see the beam has settled to purple, it is ready to use. All you do is place yourself and anyone or anything you are taking with you in the path of the beam and activate your own transmitter. You will materialise on a similar pad at the other end.”

Kryslie looked around and saw on the floor, three circular tile mosaics, smaller than the one in the room above. One was at the opening of each of the tunnels and when she walked to see them, she saw that each had a different design. One showed a rocket, one a temple and the third a bundle of wheat. The colour of the tiles in the outer circles here were blue, when the one above had a frame of yellow tiles.

“That’s all there is to it. To go beyond those towns, you reset the next generator to the next destination and repeat the procedure. Of course, you are not allowed to try it – except if directed. We’ll go back up now.”

Gann hit a switch on the generator and the beam terminus aimed at the farmlands disappeared. He pushed another button and another purple terminus appeared.

“That switch remotely activates the unit above. Come on. Jacen, go first.”

Tymos and Kryslie returned to the Conference Room just as the meeting was dispersing. They were happy to let Aldiv transmit them back to their father’s suite.

Tymoros had requested lunch for them but both stared at the plate of food in front of them.

“Is there something wrong?” Tymoros asked, seeing that their attention wasn’t on eating.

“It isn’t the food,” Kryslie answered absently. “My stomach feels tense, that’s all.”

“There is no immediate danger,” Tymoros assured her, thinking their problem was due to the reports they had heard.

Tymos grimaced, and went pale. “My stomach feels like it wants to burst.”

Tymoros gestured to Aldiv, just as he felt a tremor shaking the room, and the pictures rattling on the wall.

“Have a medic attend us here and find out what caused that tremor.”

Aldiv nodded and transmitted away.

“I’m feeling better now,” Tymos said. He also had colour back in his face. “Perhaps all that talk of war did scare me.”

“I’ll have the medic check you anyway,” Tymoros said.

“Father,” Kryslie spoke up. “Have there been wars here before?”

“In the past, yes.”

“What caused them?”

“Generally, they were rooted in the unstable generations.”

“The mutants?” Tymos queried.

“Common people tainted and mutated by our power, yes. In the past, they banded together and turned against all with Royal power and all those untainted.”

“Could that be happening again?” Tymos persisted.

“We are investigating that possibility.”

“What about wars with an alien enemy,” Kryslie said slowly. “Culture against culture?”

“Our people have mediated in wars on many worlds,” Tymoros began slowly. “We work to bring peace between different cultures on individual worlds. We do it because, in our history, such a war nearly destroyed us.”

“Tell us?” Tymos asked. He and Kryslie looked intently at their father.

“It was a very long time ago, in the early days of our power. Tymoreans were young in wisdom and some of were weak and sought power over others. Those ones warped tribes of

commoners into mindless slaves to serve their ends. Others, with different ideals, tried to stop and undo the damage. Many died. Those that believed they should serve the people triumphed eventually, guided by the wisdom of the Guardians of Peace. That was indeed a war of conflicting cultures and ideals.”

Tymoros watched the closed expressions on the faces of his children as they thought over what he had told them.

“Children, what are you thinking?”

Both young faces turned to him.

Kryslie answered. “Father, you have told us that our people serve the Guardians of Peace. Is that knowledge widely known?”

Tymoros answered carefully. “On most worlds we work without fanfare, with our missionaries blending into the local population. Worlds where we have a formal envoy, know we prefer peace.”

“It occurred to us,” Tymos spoke then, “that the aliens, came here by stealth, and so are not planning peaceful contact. We have seen aerial photo’s of the world and even if we have no large spaceports, there are places where a ship could land, openly, and not damage the ecology.”

“That’s true,” Tymoros agreed.

“So if they are intending ill to us, is it because they want revenge for some wrong they believe we’ve done them, or because they believe that if they conquer us, the universe will fall at their feet?”

“Or do they simply want our land, wealth or people?” Kryslie finished.

“The Elders, as you heard today, have foreseen conflict. All the details are not clear, except the need to protect all our people, Royal and common.”

“I had the strangest sensation today,” Kryslie revealed suddenly. “It came on me when the Elder mentioned the aliens working by stealth...”

She stopped speaking.

“Tell me,” Tymoros urged.

“It’s happening again,” Tymos interrupted, grimacing and going pale, with his hands gripping the chair arms.

Kryslie shoved her chair back from the table and was suddenly sick. Once again, the room trembled. She wiped her mouth and flopped back in the chair. Delia came over and handed her a drink. Then she went off and returned with a servant to clean up the mess.

“I felt sick this morning too, but not as bad as this,” Kryslie finally felt able to say. “My mouth felt dry, like I had not had a drink for days. My face kept going hot and cold, then itchy as if there was a wind blowing sand on it.”

“And I,” Tymos went on. “I felt my stomach bloat, like now, but it eased when I shivered. I felt breezes on my face too, and for a few instants, I thought I was hallucinating.”

The medic arrived and bowed to the High King.

Tymoros gesture for him to examine his children. He stood and walked to a chair where he sat and considered what his children had said. His instincts told him not to dismiss the matter. It was not impossible that this was a vision from the Guardians.

“Sire?” the medic interrupted the High King’s meditation.

“I can find nothing physically wrong with either of them. I suggest rest.”

Tymoros nodded and dismissed the man.

Delia took Kryslie off to clean up, and she returned wearing one of Tanya’s spare over robes.

Looking apologetic, she came and sat on the arm of Tymoros’s chair. Tymos sat on the other side.

“I will tell the Elders of your experience,” Tymoros told them. “Perhaps they can explain the sensations you felt.”

“We are only children,” Kryslie protested.

“Visions of truth are not limited to the old,” Tymoros advised.

Aldiv returned and bowed to the High King. “Sire, the tremors were from a ground quake centred near Basiq.”

Tymoros nodded. “Find out what assistance is needed in Basiq and the towns around there – then dispatch a unit of the Peace Corps with any supplies that are needed.”

Kryslie had gone pale again. A snippet of a geography lesson came into her mind.

“Father – isn’t there a major water storage basin near Basiq?”

“Yes.”

“Could that quake have been caused by the aliens? If they destroy our moisture reserves, they would weaken us,” Kryslie suggested.

“And what if they poison our soil so our crops die? Such damage could go unnoticed for a long time. And the culprits could be long gone when we discover it.” Tymos added, speaking rapidly.

“I’ll speak to Xyron. He can have his scientists visit different areas to check for such damage. When I go on my tour to the cities, I will warn the leaders to look out for odd occurrences. But is there something else that you fear?”

Kryslie blurted, “Can you be sure there is no weakness in our ranks? Why were those who weakened in the beginning, not disempowered?”

Tymoros betrayed his surprise by the widening of his eyes. How had his daughter known that all but forgotten fact?

“This world was once their world too!” Tymos added urgently.

Tymoros had a sudden premonition of his own. Could it be that the exiles were now returning?

The idea stirred a feeling of dread. Such an enemy, so genetically close to the Tymorean race, would be hard to detect.

“You can be sure of the people on the Estate,” Tymoros assured his children. “We are ever alert for signs of weakness and we are aware of the susceptibility of the young and untrained to alien influences. That is why we have the curfew.”

“Yes, father,” Tymos acknowledged, respecting the wisdom, even though the uneasiness persisted. “Goodnight, father.”

Tymoros watched his son depart, but when his daughter stayed, he wondered why.

“Kryslie? You still seem worried.”

Kryslie laid her head on her father’s shoulder. “I trust your wisdom, Father, but I am still uneasy. I don’t know why. Perhaps I am just tired.”

Tymoros shook his head slightly.

“I trust your instincts,” he said surprising Kryslie. “While I am away, I will meditate. Even the faintest suspicion of weakness in our line – I do not take lightly. Yet I trust the Guardians to guide us and grant us the wisdom to survive this trouble. We just have to think clearly and use our gifts to the fullest.”

Kryslie nodded, satisfied for the moment.

“Goodnight, Father.”

Chapter 20 - The Governors' Ball.

Stenn Reslic followed Tymos to his apartment after the day's lesson in advanced weaponry concluded.

"You are not planning on missing the ball this evening?" he asked, noticing that Tymos had gone to his terminal and was rapidly scrolling through a list of names and faces.

"No," Tymos said absently, pulling his stool closer to sit on it. "I am just making sure I know the names of all the important commoners and the Elders that are coming."

"What? You have forgotten something you learnt less than a month ago?" Stenn teased.

"No. Have you forgotten that the cities have just had their annual mayoral elections? There might have been some changes." Tymos countered. "I have to be able to talk to the new ones too."

"If you say so," Stenn conceded. "And I suppose, Kryslie is checking out the wives and families?"

"Of course," Tymos muttered. "Or don't you have to do this sort of thing?"

"Actually, I don't - one advantage of four older brothers. Besides, it is more the province of the High King and his heirs. Anyway, only seventy-five of the ninety-seven mayors are coming. Stenn listed all the apologies, proving that he that he had already done the checking.

After watching his friend for a while, Stenn advised, "Lighten up why don't you? It's no big deal."

"Really?" Tymos retorted. "Father said we needed to be able to talk to the guests."

"Tymos, old man, the Governors have been holding their Annual Ball since ancient times. And yes, every single common born guest will want to see you and Kryslie, because none of them knew you existed until nine months ago. But I can guarantee that all you will have to do is say hello so-and-so, endure the 'oh, I thought you were younger' comments and watch them go and talk to your elders."

"Really?" Tymos looked relieved.

"Truly," Stenn agreed. "No matter that you are Uncle Ty's heirs - you are still just children and beneath the importance of the big men. And one other thing..."

"What?"

"As soon as they see your mother is about to drop another red-headed heir designate - they will forget about you and Kryslie."

"There's that," Tymos agreed. "Krys says she is due in less than a week."

"Now, a little more advice from Uncle Stenn. Tell Morov to bring you a young feast from the kitchen, because even though we provide food at these fancy balls, the commoners are like hungry locusts. You will need to eat early to have the energy for all the dancing."

Tymos groaned, but Stenn grinned devilishly.

"Apart from you having to do your official duty, there are usually a lot of decidedly attractive young ladies present and I don't mean my pretty and annoying sisters and the other royal cousins. Your main problem will be not getting eaten alive."

"Don't you start something," Tymos countered.

"I am not a complete fool," Stenn grinned. "And my name isn't Konn."

Knowing that Stenn and Konn kept rubbing sparks off each other, Tymos asked, "How does he fit into this discussion?"

With a reminiscent chuckle, Stenn explained, "A couple of years ago, one of those delightful female guests set out to trap my amorous brother. Some one...directed one of the guards to his rescue."

Tymos had a very good idea who that had been.

“Did you know...my father has a very impressive speech for such occasions? You really don't want it targeted at you.”

“So what are you trying to say?” Tymos said after a chuckle.

“Tonight is for having fun. Forget the work. Things will be pretty slack tomorrow too. Many of the invitees will be staying as guests in the palaces or the Government building. Some will be having meetings with high-ranking people. Until they all go, everyone is distracted.”

“The guards too?” Tymos asked.

“When everyone is gone, which is usually by lunchtime, the guards do get a bit less alert. Just about all of them will have done a double shift.” Stenn advised.

“Why don't you join Krys and me to eat?”

“Like to old man, but I am due for this huge family conference quite soon,” Stenn grimaced. “Usual stuff – but I can't get out of it.”

A polite cough distracted them.

“Yes, Morov,” Tymos acknowledged.

“Prince Tymos, His Majesty requests that you join him for an early tea. You will need to get properly dressed first.”

Stenn waved and sauntered to the door. “The duty discussion – you'll see. I'll catch you tonight.”

Kryslie emerged from Tanya's sitting room as Tymos materialised in the High King's apartment. He blinked in near disbelief. Fortunately Tymoros commented, saving Tymos the need.

“You look magnificent, Kryslie. I am going to find it hard to match you.”

“I doubt that! As soon as anyone sees you and Tanya, they will forget about me,” Kryslie predicted.

Tymos glanced at their foster mother in her loose fitting pale green gown, and had to admit that she seemed to be glowing. He made a mental comment to Kryslie.

“I agree,” she thought back. “What do you think?” Kryslie spread out the floor length flowing skirt and then twirled around.

“I somehow didn't think you would let yourself be caught and put in a dress,” Tymos said aloud.

“Delia tricked me. When we wore the formal robes before, mine were like yours. How am I supposed to fight in this if I have to?”

“Kryslie, you might be almost as good as your brother in the martial skills, but tonight you are to be my cherished daughter and you will have no need to defend yourself. But if the matter concerns you so much, I could speak to Jono about giving you, and the other young ladies, lessons in self defence when wearing a dress,” Tymoros suggested, teasingly.

“Only if the young men try it too,” Kryslie responded quickly.

Tymos chuckled, “I don't think so! It's bad enough that these sleeves are so voluminous.”

“So are mine, but I don't mind them and, if I had such a thing, I could hide a wrist sheath and knife in there,” Krys countered.

“I hope you will both enjoy yourselves tonight,” Tymoros said. “It is your first chance to be seen in your official roles.”

“We had Senna's Coming Out, and Josep's,” Kryslie reminded him.

“Not quite the same, Krys,” Tymos pointed out. “This is much bigger. In some ways, this is our real Coming Out. We didn't exactly stick around for our own.”

“Indeed,” Tymoros agreed. “So while we are waiting to eat, there are some things I need to explain to you.”

“Over and above learning all the dances, and the correct protocol, and the etiquette,” Tymos pretended to groan.

“Quite. The total population of the world does not live on this estate. We are here to serve the common people as much as they serve us. No matter what you do with your life, it is important that you learn about the commoners and not just from data files and teachers. Our first duty this evening is to greet all the invited guests...”

Stenn slipped up to Kryslie as they waited in a small antechamber off the huge ballroom.

“Why are you here? I thought you would have to come out with your family?” Kryslie asked.

“Usually, but to spread the numbers around – make it a bit more even – I came here. After all, I am your mentor, you know. How was the reception line?”

Tymos strolled across, “Pretty much as you said. Once they saw Tanya, I could have spoken in some obscure alien tongue and they wouldn’t have noticed.”

“Who is mentoring Jonko and Keleb?” Kryslie asked.

“Denlic,” Stenn assured them. “Oh, and you might like to know that it is absolutely packed out there. The dancing will be on the terrace as well as in the ballroom. They had to push the refreshment tables out a bit and put extra lights around the edge of the garden. So, are you ready for the dancing? Your father is about to give his welcome speech.”

Within the ballroom, applause erupted High King Governor Tymoros finished his short speech. Cheers came from the less restrained younger guests on the terrace, who had listened to the speech through speakers set up out there. The glass walls of the ballroom were pushed open so those on the terrace could view the speaker.

Tymoros walked down the curved stairway from the musician’s balcony as the players began the prelude to the stately Dance of Welcome. As he reached the level of the ballroom floor, Tanya emerged from the antechamber under the balcony and took his arm. Simultaneously, Jono Reslic and his consort, Seoni, and Xyron with Dari, emerged from rooms on either side of the dance floor.

Guests, who had, minutes before, occupied the space, moved back.

The Governors and their consorts traditionally began the Dance of Welcome, but this year, the introductory measures would be shorter, in deference to Tanya’s advanced stage of pregnancy. The audience watched the exceptional dancing skills of the Governors, but most eyes were on Tymoros and Tanya.

The music changed for the second part of the dance, and Tymoros returned to the antechamber, and eased Tanya to a seat.

Stenn whispered to Tymos, “Our turn. Get going.”

He had manoeuvred to partner Lexina, and had inserted them into position immediately behind Tymos and Kryslie.

The next part of the dance was for the children, nieces and nephews of the Governors, and they emerged in a glittering stream. The leaders wore robes of gold and silver, as they were the Heir Designates of each Governor. They were followed by the rest of the Royal Children who had “come out”.

The girls wore dresses made from glittering fabrics in all colours, each trimmed in gold or silver. The boys varied, those in Reslic’s family wore black and gold. Xyron’s younger sons blue and gold, and the nephews of Tymoros wore purple and gold.

The colours mingled as the children formed a large circle and the dance began. The girls twirled to change partners every few steps, until they returned to their first partner. Then, both girls and boys spun out to take new partners from the invited commoners. Every few measures there after, the children bowed to their partners and spun out to find another.

When the dance finished, Tymos and Kryslie bowed to their partners, smiled at them, and withdrew out onto the terrace where another group of musicians were playing for the younger guests.

Waiters brought drinks to the young royals, Tymos found Morov beside him with a glass of an energizing drink, and Delia moved up beside Kryslie.

A murmur began to spread through the crowd as Tymos and Kryslie were recognised. Since coming to Tymorea, their hair had changed from light brown to dark copper red, like that of Tymoros. That plus the coronets of their position as Heir Designates, made all eyes turn their way.

Behind them, Stenn spoke softly, "Don't forget to spread yourself around."

He acted on his own advice and went towards the nearest attractive girl who was suddenly torn between trying to talk to Prince Tymos and dancing with the equally attractive son of the President.

If the young guests were initially in awe of seeing the High King's children, they were soon at ease. Neither Kryslie nor Tymos were overly conscious of their rank and as relative newcomers to Tymorea, they were avidly interested in hearing from the people who lived off the estate. They greeted everyone with open friendliness.

Tymos easily handled the questions of the bolder guests, and Kryslie sought out the shyer ones. They both became adept at changing dancing partners with their royal cousins - thus sharing the attention.

Two questions were asked frequently. The first was why no one had heard of them until recently. Their answer was the truthful, "we did our early schooling off world and came here when we were old enough."

No one thought it strange that the High King may have travelled off world.

The other question was about when Lady Tanya's baby was due.

Kryslie would smile and say, "Soon, she hopes, but you know what it is like. The baby will come when he or she decides to."

Since no official announcement would be made until the child was born, Tymos and Kryslie usually turned away further questions by asking yet another young guest to dance. Of course, such an offer was not to be declined as it could well be a once in a lifetime opportunity.

At regular intervals, Delia and Morov brought drinks to their charges, and were as unobtrusive as the waiters who were offering trays of finger foods to the resting guests on the edge of the terrace. No one particularly noticed that the High King's children only ate what their attendants brought them.

Tymos and Kryslie were enjoying every minute, but in part of their mind, they were aware that the apparent freedom was illusory. There was still the curfew and the ring of guards around the terrace were to guide any guest that strayed into the dark gardens back into the lighted areas.

In the back of their mind was the awareness of the extra guards around the Isolation Building that now housed another twenty newly arrived captive mutants.

Kryslie, dancing near the centre of the terrace, felt a sense of vague alarm from her twin's mind. Without missing a step, or seeming to ignore her dancing partner, she queried him.

Tymos's thought came back, "I know this sounds odd, since everyone has been looking at us and wanting to dance with us, but I feel like I am being watched."

"We are, bro," Kryslie thought the obvious.

"Yes, but everyone has seen us by now. What I sensed was a sort of ...ah, the High King does have a whelp. Like the person had just made an important discovery."

Kryslie manoeuvred her current partner towards the edge of the terrace and sought for an anomaly. Immediately, she too felt a strong mental surge that breached the mind shields she had blocking the general ambient emotions of the guests.

“You are right, Tym,” she thought back in shared alarm. “I just had the definite sense of shock that there are two of us.”

Tymos kept dancing, and chatting to his partner, but his eyes were trying to scan the near darkness, and other senses were trying to locate the guards.

Finally, he noted, “One guard is down.”

“And I still feel that watcher is staring at me,” Kryslie thought. “The person has to be close.”

“These lights are too bright,” Tymos thought as he smiled at a joke that his partner was telling him. “But there is a second guard down, level with me.”

Kryslie danced closer to her twin and was facing outwards when the musicians took a break.

“I can see someone, just beyond the light,” she thought at Tymos. “Male, I think. About our height and wearing simple garb – like the servants, but dark.”

Kryslie thanked her partner and gestured for waiters to bring refreshments to the group gathering around her. Tymos moved his hand unobtrusively to press the ‘danger now’ button on his monitor. It was hidden under his gold tunic.

“Who ever he is, he has a nerve,” Tymos thought tersely.

Kryslie had to agree. She still had an awareness of the stranger, and he hadn’t moved – was still staring at her and her brother and seemed oblivious to the fact that he had been spotted.

She heard a low buzz from her monitor, and sensed guards moving inward from the darkness to their position. The tone of the buzz changed and Kryslie looked at her monitor and saw the blue light flashing. In that brief moment, the intruder disappeared. Kryslie tried to sense him, but with so many commoners around, it was impossible.

“Father wants us,” Tymos said aloud.

Kryslie nodded, and excused herself from the guests around. She joined Tymos and moved towards the open glass wall of the ballroom.

“He can’t be a guest,” Tymos spoke quietly, so only Kryslie heard him.

“No, if he was, and had a reason to disable two guards, he wouldn’t stand there staring at the dancers. I started seeing him as an orange image like when we used the night vision goggles and almost as clear as if it were bright moonlight. I think though, that there was something odd about his eyes. They caught the light from the terrace, but I saw no white around the iris.”

“I caught a glimpse of him as sort of an energy silhouette,” Tymos said. “Only his head and hands. It was like he was in a suit that blocks what ever energy his body emits.”

“He probably was, and if I was seeing heat – it was probably only the suit emitting ambient heat back into the air,” Kryslie decided.

If anyone were watching the terrace from the upper levels of the palace, they would have seen the people on the terrace moving in from the edges towards the centre. It was so smoothly done, that the guests were not alarmed. They simply followed the general movement of whichever royal child they were talking or dancing with.

All the royal children now had monitors, and all had received the message to be alert for danger. The Governors warned their children to stay in the centre of the terrace.

Tymos and Kryslie went to Tymoros, who was standing next to Security Chief Armon. Jono Reslic was a few feet away - he now wore a fine wire headpiece and was overseeing the search of the grounds. Armon, with a similar headpiece, had alerted him to the loss of contact with two guards just as Tymos’s warning had come through.

Reslic listened as Armon questioned Tymos about what he had seen and why he had sent an alarm. After hearing all he and Kryslie could tell him, he nodded tersely and strode off the terrace.

“We will move inside,” Tymoros directed his children. It was not simply a suggestion.

With a long look at the festivities, continuing unabated and their cousins who were still able to remain outside, Tymos and Kryslie turned to follow their father. Morov and Delia and a few

other attendants, deftly blocked guests who seemed to be moving in to speak to them, as they made their way around the edge of the ballroom to the antechamber below the balcony. Speculative glances from the guests followed their progress.

Aldiv fell in behind the group, ready to transmit them to the High King's Suite. Though once they were out of the public gaze, Tymoros directed them to go to a room on the third floor that had a balcony overlooking the terrace.

"If I may advise, Your Majesty," Aldiv spoke deferentially. "Is it a good idea to stand on the balcony if there is an intruder in the grounds? You would be an excellent target for a sniper."

"Surely if that intruder intended..." Tymos began.

"We will stay inside the glass," Tymoros stated, tacitly agreeing with Aldiv. "Perhaps, Tymos, you would think of a reason why?"

"No, you are right," Tymos agreed as he sensed Kryslie coming to the same conclusion. "If there is one, there might be more and if we don't know what the intruder is, we can't guess what is intended."

Tymoros added another reason. "And if, as you both feel is the case, the intruder was interested in you – I will not let you be endangered."

They had to accept that, and so while they could not watch the dancing below, they were able to follow the movements of the guards by the tiny red and green lights on their night vision goggles. However, they were told to stay at the edge of the windows.

After he had been sitting for a while, Tymoros asked his children, "How were you able to see the intruder?"

Tymos turned. "Well, I was aware of the ring of guards, and then I felt a gap – so I looked and ...well, I also felt I was being watched."

"I spotted him," Kryslie admitted. "I saw him as an orange energy silhouette."

"Yes, I was looking, and needed to see ... I didn't think it odd then, but I saw his head and hands as an energy effect. Is this a manifestation of our power too?" Tymos asked.

"It is one of the rarer gifts of our line," Tymoros remarked. "Since becoming Governor, I have had the ability to see clearly in the dark. Tell me, what is the colour of the crystal in my ring?"

He drew his left hand into the light and allowed his children to examine the inset gem. Both looked at it from several angles. Their eyes seemed to change shape very subtly.

"The crystal itself is red," Kryslie said thoughtfully. "But I can see a faint blue aura."

Tymos nodded. "Yes, I can see that too. What does that mean?"

"It merely proves that you both can see light outside the normal visible spectrum. I can see the blue aura in the dark. Your vision must be better if you can see it in the light. However, such a gift is not bestowed without a reason, and you must learn to recognise all your gifts"

"Your Highness!" an excited and imperative call came from behind them.

"Silkim!" Tymoros turned, gently rebuking the attendant for his breach of manners.

"Sir! The Lady Tanya – her child is about to be born. She is asking for Princess Kryslie," the attendant blurted the rest of his message.

"Father, I will bring news as soon as I can."

Kryslie hugged her father and followed the attendant back to where Tanya was resting in a room off the Royal Nursery.

Tymoros watched her go, then turned to Tymos and spoke softly.

"Son, I do not wish to stay tamely in my sanctum to await the news. Will you come with me to the nursery to add our encouragement to your foster mother?"

Tymos wasn't certain about the idea but he agreed, sensing along with other complex emotions, his foster father's deep anxiety. He was sure that Tymoros did not realize that he was betraying the extent of his feelings. From what he sensed, Tymos knew that his foster father needed his presence and his strength.

If the High King was an unexpected arrival in the nursery, no one stopped him from changing into suitable garments and staying beside his labouring wife. His very presence seemed to calm her and give her strength. It felt right to be there, to help the one who so often gave him back his serenity.

Tymos, standing by one of the windows, felt awkward as Tanya's labour progressed but Kryslie knew he could no more leave than Tymoros would. She was able to help by giving drinks to Tanya and washing her face with cool scented cloths, while the midwives checked the progress of her labour.

"I can feel him, Krys!" Tymos said unexpectedly in his sister's mind. "I can feel his determination to be born. I can feel his presence!"

Kryslie met his eyes. "He knows we are all here to welcome him!" she said to her brother's mind. "It feels so right to be here!"

Near midnight, Tanya gave a mighty push and as she called out with the effort, her child emerged with a rush. He gave a hefty bellow as he drew his first breath. The midwife placed the boy child on her stomach, and Tanya, supported by pillows looked at the red wrinkled child and delighted in his perfection.

After cutting the birth cord, the midwife took the baby to be examined and cleaned up. She returned with the child wrapped in a soft blanket, crying softly, and passed him into Tymoros's arms.

Tymos came over and he and Kryslie hugged their foster father as his eyes watered with intense emotion – gladness and joy, tinged with fear.

Kryslie broke free and went to hug Tanya, sharing with her some of the emotion she was sensing from Tymoros. Then, when the rest of the birth process was over, and Tanya was sitting comfortably in a clean bed, exhausted and exhilarated, Tymos directed Tymoros over to her. Kryslie doubted that he had moved since he was given his son to hold.

Out side and in the ballroom, the festivities had continued but now they became stilled as sounds like shots heralded a magnificent fireworks display. Very soon, the word spread that Tanya had given birth to a Royal Prince, and the crowd broke out into spontaneous cheering.

The roar of the cheers was audible, though muted in the nursery, where the baby was now suckling next to Tanya. Tymoros sat next to her, unable to take his eyes off his newest son.

"Your Majesty?" Alexon murmured softly.

The High King reluctantly drew his attention to the physician.

"Will you be making the traditional presentation this evening?"

After a moment of consideration, Tymoros decided. "We don't have a quorum of Elders here, but we certainly have enough witnesses for a presentation."

It wasn't quite traditional, but his newest son had chosen this night to be born and it seemed like a good omen. "We can do the presentation from the ballroom balcony – if all is well with my son."

"Your son is strong and healthy," Alexon assured him with a smile of genuine delight. "I will send for the proclamation robe.

Tymoros waited for Tanya to detach the suckling mouth and pass the suddenly grizzling child to him.

"Hold your brother, Tymos" Tymoros directed. "I will have to dress again to suit my rank. Kryslie, if you would care to become presentable also."

Kryslie grinned at the stunned face of her twin as he let one of the midwives show him how to hold his brother. She thought at him, "Talk to him."

With in moments, the tiny boy stopped whimpering, as if he already recognised Tymos. The eyes of deep blue looked up and seemed to see the brother who held him.

When Kryslie returned, once again in her formal clothes, Tymos passed their brother to her. She sent mental greetings of love to him, and she too looked into the deep blue eyes and felt a connection. It remained, even after Tymoros took his son back.

The crowd in the ballroom hushed. Everyone who could push their way in did so. The High King and his two eldest children were slowly descending the stairway that led down from the high balcony around the ballroom. The musician's dais had been rapidly cleared and Tymoros made his way to it.

He began to speak in a clear carrying voice.

“Let it be proclaimed that on this night a Prince was born. He is my son, Llaimos.”

Tymoros had his son in his arms and slowly raised them. The people caught a glimpse of the baby's face before Tymoros quietly told Kryslie to return his son to the nursery. She did, aware of the two attendants accompanying her.

At that moment, the official rocket salute announced to people living out beyond the estate that a Prince had been born.

“Hush, little brother,” Kryslie spoke softly to the baby as the loud noise startled him into crying. “That is for you. We are telling the whole world that you are here. Our father has waited a very long time for you, precious Llaimos. We are on our way back to your mother, and you can drink again, and your father will return again to adore you.”

The Royal Ball resumed with new vigour as the guests rejoiced at the news. None of the guests would forget this night of history.

In the gardens, the search continued for the brown clad stranger who had made two the guards unconscious and had, during the few minutes of distraction during the proclamation, managed to release the mutant leader from his room in the isolation building.

The remaining mutants in other isolation cells heard the rocket salute. They knew the meaning of the resounding echoes. Even the most hardened of them shuddered involuntarily. The visitors who had befriended them had predicted the birth of this child, one of three who would be the protectors of the Royal Tymoreans, one who would tread the mutants into the dust.

Each one of the prisoners wondered how this child would affect the plans of the visitors to conquer the planet. Still, it would be many years before the child would be a threat to their plans and by then the world would be conquered!

Chapter 21 - Infiltrators.

Shielded from view by the low bushes at the edge of the forest, Warlord Kellex waited with his squad of highly trained infiltrators. From that position, they had a clear view down the road that led to the estate of the Tymorean Triumvirate Governors. Soon, the youngest member of the squad would be returning.

Further into the forest was the gaggle of mutants chosen as servants by the alien warlord.

Kellex snarled as he heard them cavorting in a wild and noisy manner. Without their leader, they were a mindless mob – unpredictable, unruly and foul mannered. He briefly considered having them all killed, but this lot had an uncanny way of knowing when the Tymorean patrols were approaching.

Too bad that those with the so-called “inner eye” had proven useless at ambushing the patrol. It was no great loss over all, but he needed the help of the ugly ones and that help depended on their leader.

Kellex snarled again, noticing the nearest of his men shift position slightly and become very intent on the road towards the palaces.

The squad members shared his annoyance at having to act on behalf of the ugly ones. It was intolerable.

“Warlord, our rider is returning,” the squad leader reported.

Kellex lifted his distance viewer and focussed on the dust cloud in the distance. With his vision enhanced by the device, he could make out two riders on the horse. He continued to watch until the riders were clear to his unaided sight. The second rider was the mutant leader.

“Send Xan to me when he arrives,” Kellex ordered as he walked a short distance away from the rest of his squad. The damned ugly ones had stopped their cavorting and were crouched in a huddle behind his squad. They were already aware, it seemed, of their leader’s return.

The young outrider rode into the forest as the sun began to climb above the hills further east. When he was deep enough into the cover of the forest, he ordered his passenger off, before dismounting himself.

In spite of the annoying presence of the ugly ones swarming around their leader, Xan was grinning. He pulled off the matt black hooded cape and stuffed it in his saddlebag. That garment had, as intended, made him practically invisible. He mentally crossed his fingers. There had been one moment when he had been watching the dancers – particularly the red head that had the fancy head decoration - the one that reminded him, of that ward of Kellex’s. He’d had the feeling that they knew he was watching but nothing had happened. That was when he’d realised he’d better get back to his main task of freeing the mutant leader.

“Warlord wants your report!” Xan’s squad leader instructed brusquely. He grabbed the horse’s bridle from Xan and gestured to where the Warlord stood not looking in their direction.

Xan looked at Warlord Kellex and from his tense posture, he knew the Warlord was impatient. He pushed his way through the mutants, all dancing around their leader, and trotted to report.

“Warlord Kellex, Sir.”

Kellex turned. “Report,” he snapped, keeping his face hard and unreadable.

Xan stood his ground.

“I entered the grounds with one of the many groups of commoners,” Xan began. “Easy. The guards were slack. I could have bought a hundred guns in with me. We weren’t searched and I spent a lot of time wandering around – openly – and was never questioned.”

“You should not under-estimate the guards,” Kellex warned. “I doubt they are the simpletons they look. This planet has a reputation that I have not yet seen proved.”

Xan made his young looking face seem more sober. "I will remember that, Sir. The guards mostly stayed around the garden at the front of the palace. The one called Palace Gardens on the map you gave me." He couldn't help the disdain in his voice. "They were all intent on keeping the commoners from wandering. I kept with different groups and went into the guest room areas in each palace. They had servants watching them there, but I managed to look at the second floor of each palace."

Kellex was impressed but he said nothing. Xan took his silence as an indication he should continue his report.

"Once it grew dark, I had no trouble slipping away from the commoners and I put the stealth robe on and walked between the guards circling the garden. The map was excellent. I was able to verify the location of all the buildings and that they had guards around the Isolation Building. I deduced they had the captured ugly ones there."

"Were you seen when they released that Mithas creature?" Kellex demanded.

"No. I had gone to observe the guard routine at the Isolation Building. There was some distraction and the guards were watching the frenzy of point lights in the sky. I slipped into the building, found Mithas and we slipped out. I hid him with me under the robe."

"How did you get out of the estate," Kellex asked, hiding the intensity of his interest.

"The green force field worked on the gate guards," Xan reported. "I checked the walls, but the multi-sensor you gave me detected some kind of force field just inside the walls."

"That's new," Kellex mused aloud. "I wonder if they started that after my last visit."

"What was that, Sir?" Xan asked.

"Never mind," Kellex growled. "It won't stop me. What else did you learn whilst you were there? Did you locate the entrance to the underground caverns?"

"No. Sir. I couldn't get near that place during the day and there was no sign when I checked after dark." Xan tried to sound apologetic.

"They may have blocked them," Kellex mused. "There used to be a way onto the mesa through the caverns. Though I thought...there must still be a way. One of my little experiments took someone there."

Xan had a feeling that he knew what his superior meant by 'experiments'. Warlord Kellex took delight in corrupting unsuspecting Royals – playing with their minds. He could only do it with a few.

Kellex seemed to forget Xan for a few moments. He mused aloud, "Somehow my experiment's prey got free. Resisted me. I heard it think at me that it was second rank. It might have been one of the governors' brats. I would have liked to have that one."

Xan felt a shiver run down his spine. Warlord Kellex was not like Warlord Xezir, who had sponsored him into cadet officer's training. Xezir was straight and a fair commander. You always knew where you stood with him.

But then Xan thought, "I'm still getting used to Kellex's ways. I'm his newest sub-commander." Kellex was good. He knew his men so well that it was almost as if he read their minds and could sense what they were doing.

"I asked you a question, Sub-Commander Xan," Kellex spoke sharply.

"I'm sorry Commander, I was thinking on something else," Xan flushed red.

"Did you locate the rear entrance to the estate?"

"Yes, Sir. There is a very intense force screen there and a line of force along the top of the wall."

"Does that force on the wall go all around?"

"I believe so though I did not follow it all the way around," Xan reported.

"You've done good work," Kellex finally acknowledged. "However, I expected you back sooner."

Again Xan flushed, and he decided he had better admit to his moment of weakness. “I stopped to watch the dancing for a bit.” He felt the intensity of Kellex’s gaze on him. “I was trying to decide what makes the so called royals so great.”

Unbidden, the picture of the young red headed male, with the crystal and gold coronet came back to his mind. He had watched that one because he was very like his memory of Kellex’s oldest ward.

“And what did you conclude, Sub Commander?”

Kellex looked like an owl ready to strike its prey.

“They look much the same as the commoners except more expensively dressed and they look like us! I saw one there that reminded me of your ward, Sir.”

“What? Describe him!”

“Young, not quite adult, dark red hair, wore a glittering headpiece, and silver and gold clothes.”

“Where in all the frozen and dead worlds did he come from?” Kellex swore.

“Sir?” Xan queried.

“Go and bring our prisoner here,” Kellex ordered, and added, “Now!”

When that tone was used, it was prudent to obey immediately. Xan repressed a shudder. The prisoner was one of the Tymorean road patrol guards. Kellex had taken him a week ago and he had past the ‘experiment’ stage. He was one of Kellex’s ‘toys’.

Probably, the man had once looked very smart in his brown and silver uniform, but now he was dirty, dusty and unkempt. And very, very drunk.

Xan delegated two junior black clad soldiers to unchain him from the tree and drag him to his feet. The creature could barely walk.

“Bring him to the Warlord,” Xan directed.

He looked in disgust as the prisoner lurched and almost threw himself on the ground, gibbering and pleading. If Kellex managed to get anything useful from the creature, it would be amazing. The two soldiers threw the prisoner at Kellex’s feet.

To Xan, it seemed that Kellex merely glared down at the prisoner.

“Tell me about the High King’s brat.”

“Wha...,” the man tried to speak. “He don’t ...don’t have any. His consort is about to have one...tha’s all.”

“Has had it,” Kellex corrected.

“Yeah, tha’s right. Heard the rockets,” the prisoner agreed. “Baby musta come.”

“I mean had one sixteen or so years ago,” Kellex insisted. “Where’d he come from?”

“Don’t know. No, wait...wait a bit...”

Kellex scowled, as the prisoner tried to think.

“My little bro said somethin’...no...I was told my bro did somethin’ to Prince Tymos. Was in deep trouble.”

Kellex’s attention intensified.

“What did he do?”

“Stuck him in a hole,” the prisoner tittered. “Didn’t know it was the prince. Whelp had brown hair, like a commoner, looked like a yokel. An arrogant snot of a missionaries brat.”

Kellex nodded thoughtfully. “My agent saw a red head with a coronet,” Kellex commented.

“Musta dyed his hair,” the prisoner said with drunken solemnity. “King hasta have an heir.”

The idea that this prince must have been kept hidden, possibly off world, occurred to Kellex, and it irritated him. They obviously decided it was time for the brat to be ‘educated’ or as Kellex considered things, ‘brainwashed’.

He thought back to when he had felt that ‘second rank’ mind. If that was the Prince, he had been strong enough to resist his attempt at mind corruption. However, if this prisoner’s brother had been his ‘experiment’...the drunken worm might still have more uses.

“What happened to your brother?” Kellex asked. He had received nothing from that ‘experiment’ for months.

“Got his power, what little he had, neutralised,” the prisoner said, sounding angry. “But then they put him in the Peace Corps, to stop him whining. He might be an officer one day, they reckoned. Not like me.”

And that, Kellex decided, had possibilities.

The drunken worm just earned an extension to his life – at least until he identified his brother, the lost ‘experiment’.

“Where would they keep the new baby?” Kellex asked, as if idly.

“Where you think? In the nursery.”

“How do you get there?” Kellex asked mildly.

The prisoner obediently explained in solemn detail. Kellex gestured and the soldiers took the prisoner back and chained him up.

“Go and bring team alpha here,” Kellex directed Xan. “We are going after the king’s brats.”

As he watched his new sub-commander trot off, Kellex quietly fumed. The High King’s whelp was already almost fully trained – if he had reached a stage where he was trusted with the common people. He must move to eliminate him before he became too powerful. It worried him that he had not known about this adolescent one until now. He knew more about the royalty on this world than any other of his kind did and he had successfully abducted three of the High Kings children long before they were this age. The other two had already been older, and had needed killing. Yet this one had been kept secret, to survive nearly to adulthood.

When his team assembled, Kellex had Xan reporting his observations in detail so that the team could visualise the estate, learn the habits of the guards, plan their raid and predict what weapons to use and defend against.

Xan then fell silent and listened as Kellex outlined the raid plan. “We will ride across country – make our move once it is dark, and be within the estate and in cover by morning. We will observe until the afternoon shift change. The older brats usually have outside classes in the afternoon and will be easier to get at. Two of you will go for the nursery and the baby. I want it alive if possible. Two of you will release the ugly ones. Their clumsiness will cover our activities and escape. The rest of you will go after the king’s brat. He will be well guarded I expect. Any questions?”

“Sir,” Xan interrupted, and was glared at. “I saw two red heads with coronet things. The other was a girl, much the same age as the boy.”

“Why didn’t you tell me about her?” Kellex demanded.

Xan kept quiet. No use saying that Kellex hadn’t given him a chance to tell him.

“Sure there wasn’t any more?” Kellex went on, making Xan flush.

“I only saw two, Sir,” he stated.

Kellex adjusted his plan to allow for two adolescent brats. “Go get ready,” he dismissed the team and told Xan, “You go and keep the ugly ones in line. I need to think.”

Xan felt he had narrowly escaped a near death experience. Kellex felt like an unexploded bomb for some reason. Guarding the ugly ones seemed like a much better place to be – and now Mithas had returned, the rest had settled down.

While he leant back against a tree, watching the ugly ones, he thought over what he had told Kellex. He decided the mention of the adolescent prince had him simmering.

After a while, Mithas strolled over, passing the prisoner and spitting in that direction. “I never thanked you for freeing me,” the mutant remarked.

Xan shrugged. He had done as he was ordered.

“You could’ve got tribes folk out too? Before the royals torture them?” Mithas asked, belligerently.

“They’ll be freed,” Xan said. “You’ll have to wait.” He stared at Mithas to give him the hint to move away – but the leader of the ugly ones stayed.

“I only had one horse,” Xan said defensively.

After another moment of intense regard, the mutant ambled off. Xan breathed a sigh of relief. At least Mithas looked normal; he wouldn’t want to get too close to any of the others.

Team alpha rode off at a trot, taking with them two carts and a covered wagon. They looked like they could be Tymorean or off world traders. Kellex rode at the head off the group, as if he had a personal stake in the mission.

For a moment, Xan considered his commander’s intention to capture two children and a baby. Both the older children, who weren’t much younger than he was, had seemed to be nice enough. The commoners had flocked around them and they had smiled a lot. Then the cynical voices of his teachers came to mind. He thought, “The commoners were probably hoping for favours from them.”

From everything that Xan had been told about the planet – the rulers were a degenerate bunch – only concerned about their own welfare. And it seemed they thought themselves better than the rest since they lived in a walled enclave and when commoners came in they were not allowed to go just anywhere.

He had been told that the people were kept in ignorance of technology and labour saving machinery. The cities were where the brighter minds went to be educated, and the reformers became conformists. The people weren’t allowed to leave the planet and were convinced that a backwards existence was to be aimed for.

Then there was the leaders’ flat refusal to help the people of their home world. Xan came from Aerdna, and his distant ancestors had come from here. Now his world was in trouble, but they wouldn’t let his people return even though there was lots of empty land.

In fact, team beta had just returned from checking resources and doing some strategic sabotage. The people of Tymorea would learn what it felt like to be facing ecological disaster.

Team beta’s leader strolled up. “Reckon we will be doing the brats a favour,” the young officer reckoned aloud. “We’ll teach them better morals.”

Xan had no reason to disagree. Warlord Kellex had explained his reasons, and considering all he knew, they made perfect sense.

Kellex barely held his horse’s pace to that of the wagon horses. His mind was still furiously considering how the damned Governor’s had hidden two brats for sixteen years. They were nearly adult, strong minded, and if he couldn’t corrupt them and control then he would have to kill them.

He had known for over twenty years that the progeny of the High King would be the dangerous ones. The old Warrior, Sedgram, had seen it in a vision. Few had believed him, but the old man knew things, had seen other true previsions. Kellex had listened when Sedgram had said that if they were to regain the birthright of the Aeronite people, the High King’s progeny had to be dealt with.

So far, Kellex had done that – the two eldest sons of the King had been young men and were too inflexible to change. They’d had to die. The younger ones had been immature enough to mould and they were his creatures now – obedient, fully indoctrinated, and fully in his power.

And the power they had was the same as his. As a youth, Kellex had not understood the strangeness that had come over him at adolescence. However, after a week or two of illness, he had realised that his physical and mental abilities had improved dramatically. He had begun to be able to tell what people were thinking, manipulate their thoughts, and make them obedient to him.

Now he knew what it was – the same power that the so-called royals had. It proved to him that his people rightly belonged here. In fact, all his elite infiltrators had the same power, but to a

lesser extent. It was a delicious irony that the power of the royals would be turned against them but it could only be done if the High King's whelps were not allowed free action.

He didn't know which three would wreck his plans, but the only safe way was to kill them – or neutralise them. He wasn't sure about this other girl – but he wasn't going to underestimate her. Her sister was highly skilled in fighting and strategy and had years of experience. He didn't need another. If three of them would be all-powerful, he would make sure they were the three he already had.

The twelve alien infiltrators rode to the forest nearest the mesa on which the Royal Estate existed. They left the carts and their horses in the cover of the trees and used far seeing glasses to study the road that zigzagged up the steep side of the mesa. They could see the tiny figures of horses and carts coming down the road. No one was riding.

Kellex was sure there was another way in. Surely, carts that were heavily laden with supplies could not get up that way. He took from his pocket an electronic data pad with the geological survey of the mesa in its memory. The sensors on the mother ship had shown the mesa was honeycombed with caverns.

With a silent hand gesture, Kellex summoned his team leader. "Have two riders scout the base of the mesa and look for a way in at ground level. They should be able to see a trail."

An hour later, he had the information. A road led from the farmlands to the mesa. It wasn't an obvious road, since the surface blended into the surrounding ground and was hard enough to have no tracks etched on it. The rider had insinuated himself into a group of farmers bringing in a wagonload of supplies. His horse was out of sight around a slight outcrop of rock, and he had approached with his stealth suit turned on. He had climbed onto a wagon and was invisible to the farmers.

He had estimated the road to be about a quarter of the way around the mesa, and then his signal had cut out.

Kellex realised that it was probably due to being inside rock. He had to wait, and Kellex didn't find waiting easy.

"We will move around. Use the forest as cover," Kellex decided, as he spoke to the team leader. "Have your other rider continue around and wait near the entrance, unseen."

What his eyes couldn't see, his hand held sensor did. Kellex barely restrained a feral grin when his sensors detected the holographic field that hid the entrance. It detected a force field too, and he guessed that the guards, physical guards, lowered the field for the deliveries. The question was - did they have a way to detect people coming, from a distance.

In the stealth suits, his team would be invisible, but they couldn't hide the horses. "We will leave the horses here and stealth our way to the bottom of the mesa, away from that road. We can inch our way along the wall. I cannot detect anything on the rock – they may think it is protection enough. That farm cart Alpha-three mentioned will have to come back out – we need to be in place to sneak in when the field is down."

Kellex's opinion of the royal guards made him gleeful. Once again, too many years of unchallenged dominance made them blind to glaring weaknesses in their defence. Perhaps since their enslaved servants had no access to technology...

The rest of team alpha was in position when Alpha-three reported his arrival at the top of the mesa.

"The road climbs sharply inside the rock tunnel. It comes out behind the estate – near the rear entrance. I had to get off the wagon as they run some kind of scanner over each wagon before they drop the force field. From what my detector shows, the suit should reflect it. Do you want me to go in?"

Kellex considered quickly. “Yes, if you are sure you won’t be detected. There must be controls for the force field inside the gate. Would it be better to sneak in when the cart comes out?”

He heard a crisp, “Yes, Warlord.” Kellex felt that the man was amused, not at having the Warlord tell him something obvious, but at the anticipation of fooling the guards. Something about how the guards will be still slack from after having to babysit the common riff-raff, and they won’t need to check an empty cart.

When Alpha-three reported briefly, “Inserting now.” Kellex ordered his men to be ready. The carts had taken three quarters of an hour to reach the top, but coming down empty would be faster. Kellex watched for the glow of the force field to vanish and signalled for his men to move. As the carts moved out, eleven invisible wraiths slipped into the darkness of the caverns, and used the lighting provided for the men and horses to move deeper into the caverns. When these lights went off, they switched to using the sensors in their headpieces to find their way.

Kellex thought to himself that he would have had sensors all along the way - possibly remote sensors for movement to switch the lights on and off. He looked for signs of pressure sensors and told his team to keep close to the walls. Pressure sensors would be where the carts travelled, he decided.

Arriving at the top wasn’t an anticlimax because he had a much better idea of the way these royal Tymoreans thought. Their defences were against bumbling peasants not skilled infiltrators.

The way out was in the centre of a vast cleared area of rock. Kellex thought in passing that a shuttle or scout ship could easily land there, but his immediate concern was to find physical concealment. Even though the sneak robes made them invisible, for a long wait, physical concealment was better. Alpha-two was still on lookout below and would report if another cart arrived to come up. Meanwhile, Kellex sent two infiltrators in each direction to scout around the outside of the walled estate to the front entrance, and to analyse the defences on the walls.

When they were ready to leave with their prey, multiple possible ways out would be an advantage. He considered requesting a cloaked scout ship to land here, and collect the prisoners, but decided it wasn’t wise. These royals had technology and close up, a cloaked ship could be seen not as its visible shape, but as an area of visual distortion.

Then he considered sending two men to investigate the caverns further, to see if they could find other ways through – side passages that might be hidden by holographic fields.

Alpha-three sent a microburst transmission that translated as, “In place, controls located, observing until full dark.”

When none of his men could see him, Kellex grinned. This raid was working perfectly. He sobered his expression and turned his attention to the extra sense he had – all his men were fully alert. He moved his sense further abroad. He couldn’t receive thoughts from every mind but he felt touches from perhaps a dozen minds – some very young – the thoughts were unsophisticated. He received occasional thoughts from older minds – commenting silently on work they were doing. His mind brushed against shielded minds – a timely reminder to keep his own mind protected.

At least his men were unable to sense minds, even if they all had some of this ‘royal’ power.

The afternoon wore on and no more carts arrived. His men alternately scouted and rested. Alpha-four, his tech expert, knew a way to neutralise the defence field on top of the walls. He would do that when they were about to leave. The ugly ones could climb the walls to escape and provide more confusion.

Kellex did not consider all the waiting to be dangerous. It gave them all the time to study their enemy. Rushing in would be riskier. He had done this infiltration before and that time had netted him a good yield. His two eldest wards had simply walked straight out into his trap. It would not be as easy this time, two targets were older, and one was a baby. Once they were inside, Kellex intended to try to influence some of the young minds he had sensed and see if he

could lure them out. He could get them to cause some trouble. For that though, working at night was better, when the children were not so busy.

Darkness fell finally, though up on the mesa the sun lasted longer than down below. Alpha-three sent a microburst warning, and Kellex relayed it to his team so that when the force field blinked off, revealing the gate, they all swarmed in past the guards who seemed like statues in the darkness.

As soon as they were all away from the gate, the force fields went back on and Alpha-three joined Kellex.

“They have a curfew,” the voice carried softly through the head comms. “Only guards are roaming the grounds. All the people are in the area between the three palaces. There are no animals.”

“Have you a place for me to observe from?” Kellex asked.

“Yes, this way – it is near the guard house, so you can immobilise the guards for us to leave.”

“Right...where will you be?”

“I will go around near the front entrance – two ways out.’

“Excellent. Go.”

Kellex settled into position, and one by one, his team reported from their observation positions. He ran over his basic plan. Alpha-three would remain near the front gate, Alpha-four would monitor the guard’s comm. frequency, and Alpha-one and five would target the nursery. Alpha-six and seven would be ready to release the mutants. The other five would be ready to grab the two red haired brats. Two of those would aim to obtain guard uniforms and change positions with the original wearers.

All of his team had weapons that emitted the green force field. The royal Tymoreans were paralysed by it, not permanently, merely for brief periods so that they would be unaware of the infiltrators.

Each member of the team had stealth suits - skin-tight suits of matt black with holes for eyes nose and mouth. The material absorbed all light and shielded their body heat. They also wore a portable force screen to protect them if their green force field weapon was used on them. He had warned his team not to rely on the weapon, even though it had worked for Xan. His prisoner, the drunken worm, Yuri, had a kind of personal screen – so the Tymoreans knew of the technology. Nevertheless, the Tymorean design had not protected the guard from the alien weapon, so if the Tymoreans were ignorant of the green force weapon, they would not be protected against it.

Kellex stayed motionless and silent. He could hear the gate guards talking – mostly about the ball the night before. None of them realised that they had been ‘frozen’ for a few minutes, and when the roving guards joined them for a cup of beverage, he decided they were not as alert as normal. He assumed it was from having done double shifts the previous day as one of the guards had complained about. When the roving guards departed, Kellex saw the tiny red and green lights on their heads and realised they had night vision sensors. He warned his team, but all had seen the lights for themselves.

After a while, sure of his position, Kellex allowed himself to doze off and on until the morning when Alpha-four warned of the morning shift change of the guards. He took a few moments to suck on a tube and draw up several mouthfuls of energising drink.

He watched the routine of the guard change, and heard it confirmed by Alpha-six and seven. During the morning, each team reported observations of the daily routine of the royals. When the midday shift change occurred, the teams were prepared for action – had their plans ready.

The raiders went into action in the late afternoon, deftly killing and hiding the bodies of any guards they encountered. Each alien stripped the first of their victims and donned the uniform

over their body suit. They pulled the headpiece of their suit off their face and pushed it under the collar of the uniform.

When Kellex gave the command to move in, a change of shift at the Isolation Buildings occurred, swiftly and without warning. The doors to the mutants' cells were opened and the mutants told to take their chances. Some chose to follow the alien who had liberated them, knowing that soon the real guards would spot them and give chase.

Chapter 22 - Attack

“You are not concentrating,” Jarro Reslic told Kryslie, when he had scored on her for the second time in as many minutes. “Is your mind on some commoner you met at the ball perhaps?”

The absurd suggestion coupled with the painful shin where Jarro’s practice blade had swatted her, took her mind off the prickly feeling on her back. She tried to concentrate, but Jarro neatly disarmed her.

“Five minutes of push ups,” Jarro told her, and then turned his attention to Denlic.

“What is it?” Tymos demanded when Kryslie had finished the five minutes. “You’ve been distracted all morning.”

She shrugged. “Jarro might not be far wrong. I feel like I did at the ball – like being watched.”

After a moment of consideration, Tymos walked over to Jarro and waited for his attention.

“Sir?” he asked respectfully.

Jarro disengaged from Denlic and turned to deal with the interruption. “Prince Tymos?”

“Sir, both Kryslie and I feel like we are being watched.”

Jarro glanced around at the four guards and two attendants, all big solid and very alert men and murmured without disrespect, “You are.”

“Sir, I mean by someone who shouldn’t be around,” Tymos clarified.

Jarro made a hand gesture and two guards approached. He spoke to them, not betraying by his tone that he did not completely believe the warning. He told the guards to call for reinforcements and do a sweep of the area.

Before the two guards went off, Tymos spoke briefly. “The intruder at the ball was shielded.”

The guards took the warning seriously and dropped special glasses down over their eyes. Jarro suddenly became more alert. The guards went off at a trot and two replacements materialised a short distance away.

Tymos noticed that the six men guarding his group of fellow students were now alternatively looking outward and watching the children.

“What is it?” Stenn asked Tymos when his friend moved back to the huddle of students.

“Not sure,” Tymos admitted. “I think there is an intruder around.”

“Jonko,” Jarro called. “The rest of you pair up and use the staves for practice.”

Deliberately, Tymos and Kryslie split up. Stenn nodded to Tymos, and Kryslie paired with Keleb, leaving Lexina with Denlic. All of them were now edgily alert.

The suggestion of movement in the clump of trees nearest the group caused two guards to go to investigate. From the opposite direction, five mutants suddenly raced into view. On seeing the students and guards, they stopped their headlong dash. When the guards raised their weapons, the mutants turned abruptly and ran back into the cover of the nearest trees.

Moments after the guards reported the sighting, the monitors of all seven students emitted the imminent danger buzz. All students reacted immediately, but no transmitter was activated.

In the microsecond after the alert, when two guards were racing towards them, Kryslie saw Stenn, Lexina, Denlic and the three guards in their view, dropping staves and falling to the ground. Her own limbs seemed frozen. She sensed Tymos’s awareness of the same problem. Then Keleb moved into her line of view, looking around. He had his hand to his monitor, sending an emergency alert. He could not see the vaguely glowing figure that came up to him and knocked him unconscious. Kryslie had tried to call a warning, but she could not speak or move.

The two racing guards arrived, one grabbed her and threw her over his shoulder. She glimpsed another taking her brother. She suddenly realised that she and Tymos were the targets of the raid. She wasn't immediately alarmed - the guards were removing them from danger. However, when the guards did not transmit them to safety as soon as they were clear of the others, and when it became clear they were heading away from the palaces, Kryslie felt Tymos's sudden alarm and like drawing in a deep breath, she echoed Tymos in drawing in energy.

Suddenly, they were both able to move, to struggle and they broke free of their captors. They fell to the ground and sprang to their feet, unhurt by their fall and ready to use the unarmed defensive tactics that they knew well.

The two guards came at them, and Tymos and Kryslie each saw that the uniforms were subtly wrong and the eyes of both these guards were dark, without any white showing.

Instantly, they both reached for their transmitters, intending to get away and not caring if these intruders felt the backlash. Yet their hands felt neither transmitter nor monitor. As they wondered how the intruders had known to remove them, they needed to defend themselves from the moves meant to disable them. If the intruders had expected helpless children, they found otherwise.

Tymos noticed a glow and warned his sister, "Glow behind you," and turned to kick out at a similar glow behind him.

The new intruders had the advantage of almost perfect invisibility, and were highly skilled, but Tymos and Kryslie managed to get in several solid blows on their attackers before they were grabbed and lifted off their feet. Neither could find something to brace themselves against to break free, but the attackers could not afford to let go.

Three intruders, one visible in guard uniform and two that were merely glowing shapes, held Tymos. Two shielded intruders had Kryslie as the second fake guard was keeping watch for real guards.

Kryslie heard, "Retreat," and felt her self wrenched as her captors began to run. She saw flashes from weapons as invisible intruders held a rearguard. Suddenly her captors stopped, and Kryslie felt something pressed against her neck and coolness spread from that point. The sensation was familiar; it was like the sedative Alexon had given her. She knew she must not sleep, and once again drew in power and thought of it burning the drug from her. She felt herself dropped as her captors were jolted by the power she had summoned. It overwhelmed their force shields and stunned them.

She was still on the verge of blacking out, when a black clad figure materialised in front of her.

Tymos struggled fiercely; none of the intruders could come close enough to inject him with a hypo-sprayed sedative.

"Prince Tymos!" a sharp voice distracted him. It had the same intensity of authority as President Reslic.

For an instant, Tymos stopped struggling, looked at the visor-covered face, but then felt Kryslie's mental cry of warning, "No!" He renewed his struggles, as Kryslie launched herself at one of the intruders who was holding him. She sprang onto the man's back and knocked him to the ground, winded.

The black clad figure stared at Tymos, and used his mind as a weapon. "Prince Tymos, you will yield, NOW!"

Once again, Tymos stopped struggling, and it was long enough for the man in black to press his device against Tymos's arm.

"No!" Kryslie screamed mentally, and she saw the man flinch. "No, Tymos, no!"

She renewed her attack and disabled another of her brother's captors. She heard the man give orders to control 'the girl'. Tymos slumped unconscious, and for a moment, Kryslie was vulnerable. She felt as if part of her was paralysed. She forced her mind free of her brother's

mind, but three of the intruders had grabbed her. Two more were lifting her brother and running.

The man in black lifted his visor and approached the still struggling Kryslie. He took her face in a fierce grip and looked at her – his eyes mere inches away. She felt his mind pressing on hers, and she knew why Tymos had stopped resisting. He had likened this battle of wills to his resistance to Governor Xyron. Then he had been in the wrong, now resistance was imperative. She knew this one was the leader.

“Sir, we have to leave,” a voice shouted.

Kryslie felt the man understand the warning, sensed his decision to kill her and was aware of him moving hand to reach for a weapon. She was too stubborn to let this intruder have his way, and so she did what the man had done to Tymos, except she targeted the three men holding and running with her.

She directed a very strong command to the three men holding her. “Drop the woman!” They did, believing the command had come from their leader. She sprang up as soon as she touched the ground, grabbed the nearest intruder and swung him around as the black clad intruder fired his weapon. Her living shield gave a high-pitched shriek and fell. Kryslie grabbed the body with two hands and found she had the strength to swing the body around. He seemed to have no more weight than a wooden stave.

While leader dodged the body, Kryslie took off after her brother. As she ran, she felt the leader sending messages to others to split and retreat. She decided to try to influence the leader, and try to convince him that what he was doing was wrong or failing that to muddle his mind. She felt she was having an effect until the man brought up an image of a tungsten steel fence. Then she had no warning of his next attack.

She felt a wash of heat on her back, but ignored it. Numbness replaced the heat, and she almost tripped. She forced herself to continue, because she was the only one close enough to help Tymos. She felt herself weakening, and drew more energy from somewhere, but it wasn't enough, she was slowing, verging on blacking out.

The ones carrying Tymos were almost at the rear gate, and Kryslie saw the guards standing like statues that were staring at the approaching intruders, caught in the act of raising their weapons.

Desperation forced Kryslie to reach for something more from within herself. “Release him!” Kryslie demanded in her most authoritarian voice. They did, but immediately spun around to face her. That was a mistake, for now that their minds were on her they were vulnerable.

“Stop! Weapons down!” Kryslie sent then, “Now or you will be on punishment detail for a month.”

Hard on her thought came another from the leader, “No you fools kill the girl, and kill the boy! Do it now!”

The men tried, but found they couldn't move. The leader tried, but found he couldn't reach for his weapon.

He could move, but not take up a weapon.

Kryslie went to stand over her fallen brother, and as she took her defiant stance. She felt an inferno of anger in her mind from the leader of the intruders. “I will kill you for this. I will make you wish you had never been born.”

Another blast of heat surrounded her, as another of the intruders raced towards the gate, saw the situation and acted. The leader broke free of her control and came at her just as two mutants raced towards the gates, he saw then the arrival of a dozen armoured and force shielded Tymorean guards. He turned to run, disappearing into a distortion of air as he reactivated his stealth suit.

More and more of the palace guards were appearing. Some took charge of the three intruders that Kryslie was keeping immobile and six others surrounded her and Tymos.

“The leader was just here,” Kryslie told the guards. “He shielded and ran off.”

The Governors received the warning about the escape of mutants, and immediately sent the signal for the children to retreat. Word of an intrusion into the nursery caused instant action, but the intruders had fled not expecting mere women to be such fierce fighters. Palace guards took over from the two slightly injured women defenders.

Tymoros went to assure himself that his youngest son was safe. Llaimos had been with Tanya in the sunny room on the third floor of his palace. He assigned two of his brothers and two cousins to guard Llaimos. All were powerful men and experienced fighters.

He had rejoined Reslic and Xyron when a signal came from Keleb's monitor. The Governors knew there was more trouble.

"Tymos and Kryslie no longer have their monitors," Xyron repeated the report he had received.

Reslic was listening to reports, and issuing orders. He was aware that power was being used to fight against the intruders that were shielded, and the ones who had overcome guards and taken their uniforms. He used that sense of power to guide the guards. When the guards confirmed the location of Tymos and Kryslie, he and Xyron transmitted there. Both were shielded.

They saw Kryslie standing guard over the prone form of her brother, hands glowing intensely purple. Her expression was fierce, and she was staring at fixedly off to one side.

The guards in a protective circle around both children. Reslic had ordered them to take Tymos and Kryslie to safety, but now needed no instruments to judge why they had not. Kryslie's power, though currently quiescent, was at a very high level. Any attempt to touch her, might have overcome the protective force shields of the guards. Xyron did not need to touch Tymos as he used a diagnostic scanner to examine him. He spoke softly into the headset.

"He is not badly injured. I think his power is healing him. He should wake up soon."

Reslic seemed to ignore Kryslie for the moment, as he considered the now visible intruders being held by guards.

"Xyron, confirm my suspicions about these beings."

The three men, one wearing the stolen guard uniform, all began to struggle – sure they were about to be killed.

Xyron moved to the one in guard uniform, and did not recognise him. Then he saw the whiteless eyes, and felt the uncontrolled energy in the man. He directed his diagnostic scanner at each of the men in turn, and nodded grimly at Reslic.

Kryslie wondered what Reslic had meant – what suspicions about the intruders. She studied the captured intruders and considered the leader who had fled. He had reminded her of Reslic, with his attitude of expecting obedience. She knew from looking at their eyes, that they were not from the estate – but they did not have the feel of commoners to her mind senses.

Tymos stirred at her feet, and she looked down. His mind told hers, "They have power."

"Yes," Kryslie thought in agreement. That was why they had felt like a prickling on her skin – power, but not like her own.

"Help me up," Tymos asked, and Kryslie leaned down and offered her hand. She felt the hairs on the back of her neck prickling her, and she shivered and turned around to see where the threat was.

Reslic was drawing the jewelled sword from the sheath at his back. She stared at the faintly glowing blade.

Tymoros materialised behind Xyron and Reslic, and then turned to stand blocking Kryslie's view of Reslic.

She tried to move to keep watching, but her father moved slightly and said, "Stay still."

"Are they Tymorean?" she asked.

“No,” was the terse answer.

“They have power. I felt it. How can that be?”

“We will find out,” Tymoros promised. His voice was controlled. Behind him, a brilliant flash of light caused prominent shadows for a moment, and Kryslie felt her eyes watering from the intensity of the glare.

She also felt a null spot in her awareness of the people around her.

“Is he dead?” Kryslie asked bluntly. She met her father’s gaze and held it.

“No. He had power, but in a mutated form. It is our duty to remove it. The man will live, and we will question him.”

Tymoros’s tone was uncompromising, and his face showed no trace of pity.

“These three men are mere soldiers. They had to obey orders. You need to find the leader. He is the one who chose to attack us,” Kryslie stated.

“Are you questioning our judgement?” Tymoros asked with no trace of leniency.

Kryslie considered what she had sensed from the various intruders. The men were alive, but disempowered. “No. I am saying the leader is the most dangerous one. His power is strongest, and he desires us.”

“You and Tymos should take yourselves back to your apartments,” Tymoros directed.

Tymos felt his sister resisting the idea and he straightened his posture. A second brilliant flash occurred behind Tymoros. He decided to add his support to Kryslie. “Father, you do not need to protect us. We must learn our duty to this world.”

Kryslie straightened her posture to echo her twin’s stance. She could hear Reslic asking questions of the third captive, and could see the first two slumped on the ground.

The prisoner was staying resolutely mute, refusing to answer the questions put to him. Kryslie tried to sense his mind, but it seemed like her mind touch triggered a tirade. He began shouting his defiance, “You demon spawned dictators, I will be damned if I would submit to you. You are murderers, torturers, slavers...” His curses grew viler, but Reslic was unmoved.

Tymoros studied his children, and moved aside as Reslic drew the sword for the third time. He watched his children as Reslic moved the sword so that the edge of the blade touched the man’s neck. The man fell silent and was trying to flinch away, aware that death was imminent. He had courage and met Reslic’s gaze with a snarl.

Reslic moved the sword so that the flat of the blade rested against the man’s cheek and once again, there was a blinding flash. The man stood transfixed by agony for a moment, and then crumpled to the ground.

Kryslie wished intensely that the leader of the intruders had been the one just disempowered. Tymos watched Reslic. The President stood still for a long moment, staring at the ground. Then he sheathed the sword and issued orders to the guards. “Take these to shielded rooms in the isolation building. Have medics tend them.”

When he turned around, his expression was so totally controlled, that neither Tymos nor Kryslie could sense his mood.

“Tell me what you know,” Reslic demanded, he had his full attention on Kryslie.

Almost defiantly, for she felt that his lack of emotion meant he was angry with her. She told him everything she has seen or sensed from when she had told Tymos of her feeling of being watched. She ended with, “I can still feel them. There are more still nearby.”

“Yes,” Reslic agreed, and he turned his attention to Tymos. “Have you anything to add?”

“No, Sir,” Tymos said with careful politeness. “Kryslie has covered everything.”

Reslic considered them. “You both did well defending yourselves. Let us deal with the remaining intruders. Go back to your apartments.”

“I can help you find them,” Kryslie insisted. She resented being sent away. She wanted to see that black clad leader disempowered.

“No,” Tymoros denied. “They want you dead or captive. I will not allow you to risk yourselves.” He spoke into his headpiece and summoned two attendants.

Kryslie still felt the other minds, of the ones like those just disempowered. She sensed one approaching, confident that he was unseen. She spun to face the direction of the intruder's approach and felt his alarm that she was now facing him.

"There is one there," Kryslie stated, pointing. Two guards fired a force weapon in the indicated direction. A glowing outline appeared briefly, of a figure about to fire a weapon. Another palace guard followed up by tossing something at the figure. It exploded with a subdued 'phut' and the figure became visible and dropped to the ground.

Kryslie and Tymos immediately felt a surge of rage, and instinctively joined hands. The leader of the intruders was not far away, and he was urging his men to, "kill them all."

Some force was held them rigid and then energy like molten lava surrounded them.

"That damn force field," Tymos swore.

"He's getting away," Kryslie cursed. "Damn him." Only then did she start to be aware of the heat on her skin.

"You can't kill us that way!" Kryslie thought angrily. She drew on more power and tried to move. She couldn't do much, but turned to look at where the Governor's were. Her eyes saw the glowing nimbus around Tymoros, and his expression of despair. Her mind heard, "Go before the effect of the force field wears off. The Governors and the guards are shielded. The little freaks have to be too or they couldn't survive the disruptor. Go, you fools."

Kryslie, tried to move – to go after the leader. She felt Tymos trying to make the same effort, but his mind was on the verge of blacking out. Kryslie felt her own legs becoming weak and shaky. Then they collapsed.

Chapter 23 - Retaliation

As soon as he could move again, Tymoros went to kneel beside his children, fearing the worst. He felt rage building within him, directed at the intruders who must surely have been the cause of the deaths of his other children. And these, that he had known for such a short time...

"Ty?" Xyron spoke quietly, aware of the rage in his fellow Governor.

"They are alive," Tymoros said, his voice tight with emotion. "I don't know how it is possible, but they are alive."

"Raw power," Reslic said bluntly. "They have the potential to handle a great deal. The power they called on neutralised the effects of the disruptor, though that is a less efficient way of dealing with the incoming energy than redirecting it." He did not state that their own shields had only just handled the load and that the attendants summoned by Tymoros were lying lifeless on the ground. He summoned more guards and warned them to have force shields on.

"I think we should have these two moved quickly," Xyron warned. "The diagnostic readings I am getting are odd. It is like they are both drawing in energy from somewhere."

Reslic and Tymoros saw that Tymos and Kryslie were already stirring, even though they were still only vaguely conscious. Both had hands that were glowing purple.

"Tymos," Tymoros spoke quietly to his son. "You need to ground out the excess power, and let us deal with the intruders."

Tymos murmured, "Go ahead, it's buzzing in my head. I can't stop it coming in." He weakly moved his hand to take his father's and the power in him drained painlessly away. He was limp and unresisting as Tymoros lifted him and allowed one of the guards to transmit them to the infirmary.

Xyron spoke to Kryslie, and although she understood what he wanted to do, she didn't dare allow her power to drain away. She could still feel the minds of the intruders, and she knew she could find them, even if they were invisible. They had not given up the idea of killing her, of killing the Governor's, and any other innocent Tymorean that got in their way. She reached out with her mind to locate them, one by one, and held the minds of the intruders so they could not move. Five of them.

Reslic saw the look of concentration on her face, saw her hands glowing brightly. He understood what she was doing.

"Where?" he demanded.

"Rear gate," Kryslie said, her mind identifying one location. "They know they can't get out near the front gate. Another has a bunch of mutants around him."

Her sense of the others suddenly vanished. The images in her mind turned to a white washed wall. She heard Reslic giving orders when she stopped speaking. While she was trying to extend her reach, and break through to see where the unspeakable creatures were hiding, Tymoros returned from the infirmary.

Xyron spoke quietly to him. "I would like her right away from here, but she is using her power to find these intruders. It is apparent that she can distinguish their minds from those of our people."

Kryslie spoke again, "One is in the green house hiding under the herb beds."

Reslic stayed close to Kryslie and Xyron gave a head gesture to have Tymoros move away a short distance.

"I am also sensing a rise in anger," Xyron admitted. "Can you sense it too?"

Tymoros turned his attention to Kryslie, observed the intense concentration, and as Xyron had said – rising anger.

“She is drawing in power at a tremendous rate,” Xyron observed. “I think it will be more than the guards force suits can handle.”

“I will go with her,” Tymoros decided. He walked back to Kryslie and spoke gently. “Come, Kryslie. You can help find them equally well from an observation room in the palace.”

He felt the start of resistance from her, as she realised they were making her retreat, but then considered the rest of his words and understood they were still letting her help. She went with Tymoros and one of the guards without fuss.

They went to Xyron’s laboratory, the observation room that Kryslie recognised from her days just after transition. She felt tricked and began to struggle in her father’s hold, but he distracted her immediately. “Can you still sense the alien minds?”

“Yes,” she agreed, abruptly stopping her struggles. “But they are thinking of blank nothingness.”

“Very basic mind shields,” Tymoros remarked neutrally. “There is a technique you might try to focus your mind and make your sense of them increase. Will you try it?”

Kryslie nodded, realising that the buzzing in her head was not helping her.

“Sit on the mattress,” Tymoros invited. He lowered one of the diagnostic beds down to floor level and gestured to it. As Kryslie made herself comfortable, sitting cross-legged on the mattress, he lowered the second bed to a comfortable sitting level for himself. Then he met his daughter’s eyes and began to teach her a mantra of focus, having her repeat the phrases after him. As her concentration on the phrases deepened, he added new ones and she copied him, unaware that he was now helping her slip into a meditative trance. He was putting her mind into a resting state. He watched her for a while after she had stopped speaking and saw the intense purple glow of her hands fade to mauve. She was not aware of him when he stood up, or when he transmitted away.

To the guard standing outside of the shielding circle around Kryslie, he said, “Notify me of any change.”

Tymoros returned outside to rejoin the hunt for the remaining intruders and mutants. From the messages and orders audible through his headpiece communicator, he knew that eight of the intruders had been captured, and twenty of the twenty-eight mutants. They did not know how many more intruders remained on the estate, trapped by the dome shaped shield now activated over it, and preventing anyone leaving.

Part of his mind was on Kryslie, and her ability to sense them. It had been useful until the intruders had realised she was doing it. Then, it had made her a more important target than she had been, though she seemed unaware of that danger. He had needed to move her to safety, and from the way she was beginning to become angry, he knew it was also important to reduce her power. It was as well she had not resisted his gentle grip, or her power would have blasted his force shield, and himself. That showed she still had control, and after her power reduced, her anger should as well. Still, he was unsettled. How would she be when all the alien intruders were found and disempowered?

The search continued, but the estate covered a very wide area. Trying to find an area of distortion – a shielded man – was not easy. It began getting dark.

Tymos woke in a room that was part of the infirmary. He found that Jonko and Keleb were with him in the room. Both were looking out of a window.

“What can you see?” Tymos asked, and they both turned.

“Just the lights on the guard’s dark vision goggles. We can follow where they are moving about. It is too dark now to see anything else,” Jonko told him.

“We saw two really brilliant flashes,” Keleb added. He saw Tymos shudder.

“The intruders have power, like we do. They are not Tymoreans, and it is in a perverted form. The Governors must neutralise it.”

“Kill them?” Jonko asked calmly.

“No – they are still alive. At least the ones we saw,” Tymos told them.

“We?” Keleb queried. “Where is Krys?”

Tymos tried to reach his sister’s mind. He sensed at first a calm oasis and then a flicker of response, recognition of him, and then a flare of annoyance at being lulled into a trance. Aloud he said, neutrally, “She is helping to find the last of the intruders. Why are you two here?”

“Governor Xyron wants to be sure we have no ill affects from whatever they clouted us with,” Keleb said wryly. “We never saw it coming.”

Tymos recalled the early events. “I couldn’t move, and I saw the guards, Lexina and Denlic falling down.”

“Jon and I didn’t fall or turn statue. We saw you go blank, and the others falling and then something hit us and knocked us out. I don’t think we were out for long. The others had roused, and Stenn got really angry when he realised you both were gone and he went running off. I didn’t see you go.”

Jonko remarked, “He didn’t get very far, because we had summoned help. One of his uncles dragged him back. Stenn came here to get checked over, and then I assume he went back to his room.”

Keleb saw Tymos was trying to make sense of it all. “Apparently, they used some kind of local area force field. The medics think it targets the nervous system, and a low setting stops you moving, while a higher setting causes paralysis and you fall unconscious. When the field goes off the effect stops. Don’t know why it didn’t affect both of you that way.”

Tymos turned the question back at him. “Why didn’t it affect you two then?”

“All we can figure out,” Jonko said thoughtfully. “Is it might be because we are more human than Tymorean.”

“So you think the weapon targets Tymoreans?” Tymos considered. It was possible, he and Krys were also of mixed breeding.

“Either that or somehow it is related to the strength of the power,” Keleb proposed.

“Perhaps,” Tymos said, with his mind full of details he had subconsciously noted about the intruders.

“The intruders have power, so they would also have to be shielded against that weapon.” In his mind, Tymos sensed Kryslie pick up on that idea, and try to think of a way to make the intruders turn their shields off. He got off the bed and went to join his friends at the window.

“What the...?” Keleb exclaimed.

Six separate small explosions – visible by the flaming gases – occurred in quick succession within the area of their view. The last one caused a flare of light from skyward.

Kryslie shared the view of the explosions, and the information gave her an idea. Now, the minds of the intruders were no longer blank – they were intent on escaping during the confusion and while some force shield was down. They had planted explosions to breach the defences and to provide distractions. She sent out a thought of the explosions igniting fire around the remaining intruders, and sent the memory of intense pain, like they were actually burning. Then she sent the idea that they needed to drop and roll to put the flames out, or to turn off the force shield that the fire was burning on.

Thoughts of panic and fear returned to her. All but one mind, that of the leader. His mind was full of rage as he heard his men screaming. He knew it was a mind trick, because one of the men was right next to him. It seemed he knew Kryslie was behind it, and sent a burst of intense anger and hatred at her. Then he had to run as Tymorean palace guards were converging on his mindless subordinate.

Cursing his men for being fools, the leader ran through the breached fence, pushing past a group of mutants, to get to the opening to the path through the caverns.

Kryslie concentrated on her father and sent him a warning, “The caverns. Down to the bottom.” She didn’t fully understand the thought she had received, since she had no knowledge of the caverns or even that the estate was situated on a mesa.

As the number of conscious intruders decreased, Kryslie became increasingly aware of the buzzing in her mind. She ignored it as she tried to find the mind of the leader. He was escaping, but she wanted him disempowered, wanted him caught. She breathed in, wanting more energy, more power, to try to blast through his mind shields. It wasn’t as easy as it had been in the garden – she reached harder. The lights in the lab dimmed, but Kryslie was oblivious. She could see as well in the dimness.

The guard watching her reported to Tymoros.

Kryslie concentrated on the sense of the leader of the intruders. His mind was shielded, but not well enough. Anger and rage leaked from his mind. Anger at the loss of his team, anger that she and Tymos had not been taken, had not been killed. He was desperate to escape, to come back later to kill her, and Tymos and their baby brother.

The buzzing in her mind increased, her mood began to echo the intruder’s mind. She was angry that the leader was escaping; she wanted to go after him, stop him. Her hand reached for where her transmitter usually sat on her belt. It wasn’t there. She remembered that the intruders that had taken them, had removed them and tossed them away. She was no longer content to sit in safety, and she stalked towards the door. Five paces and she ran into an invisible wall of force – and cursed. She tried to force her way through it, failed and reached for more energy. The lights went out.

Tymoros sensed the change in Kryslie’s manner, and sensed the dangerous trend of anger, and the desire to kill.

He transmitted immediately to Xyron’s laboratory, outside of the circular wall of force. His daughter was not aware of him. She was still trying to force her way out of the enclosed space.

He watched her, for he could see clearly, even in the dark. She was determined, as she had been when she reached out and controlled the minds of six intruders from within the lab. She had wielded a remarkable degree of power, so astutely and yet it was still only a glimpse of her full potential.

Now, without the outlet to use the power, it was simply building up within her. She had not been trained to handle that level of power yet.

Chapter 24 - Resistance

Xyron materialised in the lab and moved nearer Tymoros. He made his own appraisal, and went to his control panels and activated several switches. Now his instruments and equipment began to power up again on the back up system. The force wall generator stayed on, still drawing its power from the main supply. Once the equipment was again operational, he checked Kryslie again. After that, he remotely adjusted the parameters of the wall.

The next time Kryslie hit the wall, light flashed from within the shield. She hit it again and again, still full of anger, but the intensity of the light was duller each time.

Xyron transferred the lighting system to the back up power supply and only when the lights came back on did Kryslie realise they were there. Her expression was a feral snarl and her anger turned on them for preventing her from going after the escaping intruder.

Yet, deep inside her, Kryslie maintained a thread of control. She knew that Xyron and Tymoros were not her enemies, knew that they could help her. Something told her mind they could help her find that intruder. So she stood still, as Xyron expanded the force wall back behind his bank of equipment. She did not bow as he walked nearer to her. Such politeness had no meaning with her mind on a more urgent problem.

"I would like to help you, Kryslie," Xyron spoke calmly. Any concerns that he had about her behaviour were completely controlled, completely hidden behind a strong mind shield of his own. He went to the couch Tymoros had left at sitting height and patted it.

"Come and sit here," he invited. "I will show you how to reduce the power buzzing in you so that you can focus better. Surely it is distracting your concentration?"

After a moment, Kryslie began to move to the bed. A voice in her mind was telling her he was right. That she needed to reduce her power. Then she remembered that she had tried that and been tricked. Without realising it, she began backing away and shaking her head.

Xyron gave no sign that her backwards movement was a bad sign. Instead, he began to exert a subtle compulsion on her, using his own power - beginning at a very low level and increasing the intensity in minute increments. He had to be careful not to arouse her suspicions, which would likely result in a powerful block and fierce resistance. To seem less authoritarian, he turned his head so he was looking to one side of her, as if he feared no danger from her. He began to speak calmly and soothingly.

"Your help has been very useful. We have captured and disempowered ten intruders and of course one of them died, so eleven in all."

"One got away!" Kryslie yelled.

Xyron nodded, not hiding the fact. "Yes, down through the caverns. Reslic send a squad after him. That one left a group of mutants stumbling around after him - lost in the dark. We have collected all those and all the mutants we had as guests are back in their rooms in the isolation building."

"They weren't the dangerous ones," Kryslie shouted. "That intruder you let get away - he was the dangerous one. He was the leader."

"Yes," Xyron agreed. "He left his men and ran. That is why we need you to power down to a level where you can help us again." Once again, he patted the couch and Kryslie moved forward, no more aware of doing that than she had been of backing away. Xyron did not try to hurry her for he sensed the fragile thread of control. It would take only the faintest suspicion of threat and she would turn against him.

Her power had reduced as she hit the wall, once Xyron had adjusted the settings to leech energy from her, but her power level was rising again and she had no reason or need to use it now - no outlet to relieve the pressure.

He could quench the power for her and return it to a manageable level – but it would require physical contact – and it was easier with cooperation.

Kryslie was almost in Xyron's reach, when he turned to meet her eyes. He saw a spurt of fear there and she stopped moving forward. Then, very slowly, he reached out and gripped Kryslie by the shoulders and she became a twisting, struggling, writhing creature, trying to get free.

It had been the eyes, and the sense of power in them that confused her. Kryslie saw the power in the eyes, and knew the mind behind them wanted to control her. The face of the leader of the intruders, who wanted her dead, superimposed itself over the face of the man she trusted. Black eyes, grey eyes, the power seemed so similar now. Then Xyron touched her, and she felt caught, felt the intruder had her again.

The intense need for an outlet for her power overcame her control. She fought to get free.

Xyron felt the backlash of her power, and dropped his hands as if they had been burnt. For a moment, he was unable to act, while he used his power to heal his hands. He knew Kryslie was backing away, expecting him to come after her, but she would not get out of the lab. She was stumbling backwards, unsteady on her feet and shaking her head.

“No, stay away from me. Stay away!” Kryslie turned her head to include Tymoros in her demand. “I don't want to hurt you.” Her words came out like a plea, and her eyes now seemed unfocussed. As Xyron moved forward again, speaking reassuring words, Kryslie began backing away again. She backed up to the lab wall, glanced at where she was and began to inch towards the door. When she reached for the opening mechanism, her hand touched the force wall. She was jolted, and once again, light flashed from the point of contact.

Xyron reached her as she stumbled forward, prepared this time for the level of backlash. He was less prepared for the strength of the mind that tried to overpower his.

“Kryslie!” a sharp voice boomed in the small space. Jono Reslic had transmitted in and had instantly understood the situation.

The full authority of his position as President Governor, bearer of the Sword of Judgement, broke Kryslie's concentration on trying to control Xyron. Instinct made her turn, trained obedience made her listen and when she faced Reslic, she began to tremble and shake. Conflicting thoughts, emotions and needs battled within her. She tried to make sense of them, to regain control, to know what she was meant to be doing. Her hands moved to her head, and pressed forcefully onto her temples, trying to block out all sensations, all thoughts.

Tymoros moved to her, thinking only of his concern for her and his desire to protect her. Kryslie didn't react to him, but neither was there a backlash, when he gently pulled her to him, and Xyron released her.

“Kryslie, daughter, we can help you,” he whispered softly, his lips nearly touching her hair. He felt her standing rigidly, and knew she was controlling herself with every thing she had. “Do you know what is happening?”

He heard the faintest of whispers. “Father, I am frightened. I can't seem to control myself. I even want to fight you. Can you help me? Please? I can't hold on much longer.”

Tymoros heard the desperation in her voice. “Yes, we can help you. You need to look at Jono. He can help you manage the power you have taken into you.”

In the very back of his mind, Tymoros knew that Xyron had taken as much of the back flow that he could tolerate. He was in a precarious position himself if Kryslie should lose control. He was unshielded, and her power was extremely strong.

Kryslie turned towards Reslic, she saw his intent gaze, felt his mind trying to dominate hers, her body jerked as she instinctively locked her will against his. Tymoros was aware of the resistance and knew it was caused by confusion and the mistaken sense of danger. Yet she was

still aware of him and had not blasted him with the power surging in her. He thought at Kryslie, “He knows how to help you.”

He vaguely sensed that she was afraid – terrified of Reslic – as if he was very angry with her.

For a moment, Reslic turned away, gestured to Xyron to raise a couch to waist height. He took the Sword of Judgement from the scabbard at his back and laid it flat on the couch. Then he turned and moved slowly to Kryslie.

Tymoros was talking quietly to Kryslie, keeping his voice low so that she had to listen hard and concentrate to hear him. “Jono is not angry with you. You helped us find the intruders, helped us keep the estate safe.”

She was still rigid in his arms. “And truly, it was unexpected that you would be able to make such judicious use of your power – so young. It must truly have been the will of the Guardians because the danger was extreme. We knew the mutants had escaped, and they were a grave threat but not enough to warrant the raising of your power. Your actions alerted us to the presence of the intruders. They attempted to take Llaimos, but failed. All the intruders are gone or imprisoned now, you do not need all that power now, let Jono ease you of your burden – help you to relax.”

Very gently, Tymoros moved Kryslie towards Reslic, who took her arms as Xyron had. Tymoros moved back. There was no backlash yet. The fear had gone, as Reslic had believed. Without him being in contact with the Sword of Judgement, she would not be sensing the implacable will of the Guardians of Peace, beings who deplored weakness in beings they had given their power to.

Yet as soon as he tried to reach her mind, Kryslie blocked him and tried to struggle free. She was weaker now, and Reslic held her easily. Tymoros kept talking softly, and returned to place his hands on her shoulders, in a gesture of support.

“Do not fight Jono, he is trying to help you. You are safe. It is time for you to relax.”

But she couldn’t, her body was still rigid with tension, her mind still resisting. Tymoros continued patiently, “He is not trying to control you, Kryslie. He is simply trying to take over the burden of trying to control the excess energy in you. Trust me. Trust him.”

Another voice, deep in her mind, urged her, “Trust him, Krys. You need his help – this time.”

It was that voice of her brother, her twin, that finally reached her inner mind and calmed her. Outwardly, she nodded, shook herself free of Tymoros, though not out of Reslic’s grip. He was holding her, but that was all. She pulled herself together, straightened her stance until she was standing correctly for facing one of the Governors, but she was looking down, taking visible deep breaths to calm herself.

Then she looked up, met the frighteningly intense blue eyes, and placed herself at their mercy – forcing herself not to resist. But in spite of that, she was tense.

The terrifying agony seemed to last for hours, taking the blinding headache and spreading it throughout her body and at first, intensifying it. Then slowly, the agony eased.

When she could once again think, Kryslie found herself on the floor, as weak and limp as a pile of delicate lace cloth and with tears streaming down her face. She had no resistance left, no energy at all, and felt as insubstantial as a wraith. There was silence in her mind, the intolerable buzzing had gone, and it was relief to have no mental noise – nothing to think on.

Reslic lifted her from the floor, sat her on the bed and supported her. He studied her face and saw some intelligence returning to her expression. She wasn’t reacting to him, so she wasn’t remembering yet. Her attention was on the Sword, where it lay, just beside her. He glanced at it and saw it was glowing with a light of its own. The multicoloured gems were scintillating. He had never seen that happening before. When he saw Kryslie reaching out to touch it, he stilled the instinctive reaction to tell her, “No.” He felt the power of the Guardians. He watched as Kryslie’s fingers just touched the surface of the blade. Her body jerked slightly.

“Kryslie?” Tymoros came and took her free hand. “How are you?”

Kryslie just shook her head. She didn't want to talk, didn't want to look at any of the Governors. When she had touched the Sword, she had felt the implacable power that she had earlier sensed in Reslic. While they had restored some energy to her, one word had filled her head, "REMEMBER."

It was impossible to forget, Reslic had made her see what she was becoming and it had horrified her. Then he had not simply controlled her power, he had blocked it from her and drained it completely. The shock of that action had been like a dousing with frigid water. It had been necessary, because even though she had accepted the need, her mind had been stuck in angry mode and she had tried to fight him. She had resented him and wanted to have revenge on him. Now she knew why he had acted as he had, why such strong measures had been needed. She wanted to be sick. She felt she had been a hairs breadth from turning rogue, from having her power destroy her.

The echo of that 'remember' was also the memory of the disempowered intruders...and it might have been her. She hadn't wanted to be like those others, the intruders and their leader. At least now, she knew how to ground the excess power for herself.

Kryslie began to shake, and Tymoros came and held her, whilst Xyron, now recovered from the backlash effects, prepared a drink.

"I'm sorry," Kryslie said very softly.

"Hush, young one. All is well now," Tymoros assured her. He took the cup of drink from Xyron and helped Kryslie to drink. He knew this reaction – it was shock and he waited for the tremors to ease and the sedative to take effect.

Kryslie woke many hours later, feeling tired and weak. The familiar things in her own bedroom reassured her. The light filtering through the still opaque window panel told her that it was well after dawn. Vivid memories returned to haunt her and she knew she would not be able to sleep further.

Glancing at the shelf where she kept her transmitter and monitor, she saw only her monitor. That meant she was to wait in her apartment until someone came for her. She sighed, resigned, but was also glad, since she really didn't have the energy to get up and dressed. Lying in bed was a luxury she usually did not have time for.

Delia woke her from a light doze.

"Wake up Mistress; you have slept in long enough. You will want to be dressed when your father summons you."

"I'm too tired," Kryslie protested.

"Nonsense," Delia told her unsympathetically. "A warm sonic shower will wake you up and I have your breakfast."

Delia's gentle bullying kept Kryslie from thinking on the 'talk' she was sure to get from her father.

Aldiv brought Kryslie to the High King's sanctum, and tactfully withdrew. Tymoros was sitting on a two-person sofa near a low table. He gestured for Kryslie to sit beside him. She walked there, hesitantly and sat on the front edge of the cushion seat.

Tymoros leant forward and took a glass of the pale green restorative drink from the table and gave it to Kryslie.

"This will help restore your strength."

Kryslie recognised the drink but sipped it tentatively, wanting to delay thinking or talking about the previous day. She felt her strength returning. Finally, Tymoros spoke.

"There is no reason why you cannot return to your lessons. Tymos and your friends, including Jono's young hothead, are already at work."

"Father, I'm afraid," Kryslie finally admitted. "I nearly betrayed your trust in me."

Tymoros drew Kryslie closer with a gentle embrace. “You were a long way from being rogue. Had you been, then touching the Sword of Judgement would have confirmed it. They did not remove your power, but they spoke to you, didn’t they?”

Kryslie shivered at the memory. “Yes, they said ‘remember’.”

“Then remember this. Your problem was simple – you summoned more power than you knew how to handle. You are still young and inexperienced. It was not too much for us to manage. Do you remember how to ground out excess energy?”

“Yes, His Excellency showed me. I thought I knew how, but it is not like Tymos described.” Kryslie did not want to think about that mind-to-mind lesson.

“Jono will see you and Tymos this evening, there are some mind techniques that we should teach you sooner rather than later.” Tymoros advised her.

“Did his Excellency ground out the power from the intruders?”

Tymoros shook his head. “They were judged by the Guardians of Peace. And they were all disempowered.”

Kryslie went still, remembering the sense she had had of those powerful beings. Tymoros interrupted her reflections.

“I am grateful that you and your brother responded so well in the emergency. The warning you gave the guard was in time to alert the estate. Because of that, Llaimos and the other children were not endangered.”

“Father, I never even sensed...” Kryslie said, aghast. “I should have sensed he was in danger.”

“Llaimos, as it happened, was never in danger. He was with Tanya in the solarium. The intruders were stopped before they reached the nursery. They did not expect our women to be so fierce.”

Tymoros was thoughtful, thinking of the link between his elder children, which he expected would spread to his younger son. He decided to ponder that later. He picked up Kryslie’s transmitter from the table and handed it to her.

“Do you know where those intruders were from?” Kryslie asked.

“Not yet. They are still in shock from being disempowered.”

Kryslie nodded. She was suddenly anxious to get back to work – to have a reason not to think on how she had felt last night.

Chapter 25 - Keleb's Gift

"What is this evaluation thing?" Keleb asked aloud while the Level Epsilon students were doing individual study. The group knew to expect a summons.

"Nothing much," Lexina assured him. "They do it four times a year..."

"And whenever they think we need it," Stenn interrupted.

"...and they just check us over to make sure we are still fit and healthy," Lexina continued with a frown at Stenn.

"And after that fracas last week," Stenn went on. "They brought ours forward - since we were the only group of students to be affected."

"I would have thought they would have checked us out last week, when they had us in the infirmary," Jonko commented.

Denlic explained, "This is a bit more intensive, and last week, my father and uncles and all the medical staff were busy with the mutants and the disempowered intruders."

"Are the intruders still on the estate?" Keleb asked. "Are they mindless now?"

"No and no," Denlic told him. "Being disempowered doesn't make you a moron - you still have your intelligence and physical skills - just not to the same level. And I heard that the captured intruders were taken to a holding place in one of the cities until they decide to talk."

"The mutants are still here," Lexina added. "Father and Uncle Ty have been trying to help them."

Stenn glanced at Tymos and Kryslie who were uncharacteristically quiet.

"What's with you two?"

"Nothing," Kryslie said quickly.

"Uh, uh. Let me guess..." Stenn mused with a grin. "A baby brother. But I thought you both had separate apartments."

"We do," Tymos agreed. "But Father had us move into rooms in his suite and Llaimos wants feeding every two hours and only settles if Kryl or I are holding him. Father has been too busy."

"That little boy is going to be spoilt rotten," Stenn remarked. "And of course, you don't get the chance to go to bed early these days, do you? Certainly not with my father imparting his infinite wisdom to you each evening. What did you do this time to deserve that?"

Tymos chose to shrug. "You could join us if you wanted to."

"Uh...no. I have been quite relieved that you've helped keep him away."

"Really? Why do you say that?" Tymos returned the innuendo.

"Something about being a young hothead and running after us," Kryslie suggested pleasantly.

Stenn looked down and shuffled his feet. Tymos was near enough to punch his shoulder.

"We nearly did need your help."

"Not the way I heard it," Stenn muttered. "My uncles made it clear that neither of you needed my help and I should have gone meekly to hide in my room. I am hoping that my father forgets to discuss it with me."

"Not a chance," Jonko disillusioned him, as one of the med-techs entered the large lyceum, and summoned Lexina and Denlic.

"Yeah, I know it," Stenn agreed morosely. He noticed Keleb yawning. "Is sleeplessness catching?"

"What?" Keleb asked.

"You - yawning?" Stenn pointed out.

"Oh, that. Our foster father has had us helping to search the archives for mentions of the force field they used on us."

“And reasons why the intruders force shields protected them from it, but the ones our guards have, didn’t,” Jonko explained further. “Oh, and trying to find out how to see people wearing their cloaking fields.”

“I heard Kryslie had no trouble,” Stenn commented.

Kryslie looked at him. “They felt different...up here.” She tapped her head.

Tymos added, “And close up, their eyes are different.”

Stenn and Keleb were called next, and Jonko, Kryslie and Tymos turned their attention to their work.

Jonko commented after a while, “I heard my foster father saying that the intruders are likely off-worlders...aliens. That being so, it is odd that they are so like Tymoreans - even to the ability to have Royal power.”

“We do,” Kryslie remarked.

Keleb emerged from the infirmary and transmitted to the Royal Court. He was on his own because his foster brother, Denlic, had gone off to do more research in the archives, and Lexina had decided to go to her apartment. His other friends had not yet emerged from being evaluated.

Xyron had confirmed that the tests were also to determine the degree of a student’s mastery of their power. As far as that went, his foster father, was pleased with his progress and dismissed him to relax since it was almost time for lunch. In fact, Keleb could see the servants setting up the lunch tables in the Royal Court.

He approached one of the servants to get a drink, and took it to a seat furthest from the tables. As soon as he sat down, he felt he wanted to be up again and pacing even though the day had become hot and muggy. He finished his drink and took the empty cup back, and then strode off the terrace to a shady tree. He was in sight of the servants on the terrace, and the patrolling guards, so he guessed he would be allowed to stay under the tree. He no longer wondered about the presence of the guards – not after last week when some invisible intruder had knocked him out.

Jonko found him sitting against the tree and went over.

“Phew! Hot, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Keleb said drowsily. “Do you realise that it hasn’t rained once since we’ve been here?”

“Huh? That’s right. I’ve never given it a thought.” Jonko wasn’t interested in the weather, so he asked, “Have you had lunch yet?”

“I’m really not hungry,” Keleb admitted, opening his eyes. “But don’t let me stop you.” He gestured to the food tables that were surrounded by milling adults and students. “You could bring me a drink though.”

Jonko didn’t push his friend, and went off towards the terrace. He returned with a plate of sandwiches and two drinks. Stenn followed him.

“Thanks,” Keleb said as he took the drink from his friend.

“Aren’t you eating?” Stenn asked. “Or have you?”

“It’s too hot,” Keleb claimed.

“Hmm,” Stenn commented. “Not like you not to eat. If you hadn’t just been checked over, I’d say you were sickening for something.”

“It’s the heat. It’s the first time it has been so hot since I’ve been here.”

“I guess...” Stenn considered as he took a huge bite of his sandwich. “But this is typical for late in the season.” The words were muffled by the food in his mouth. He paused to finish chewing before adding, “It means the season of Storms will be starting soon.”

Jonko finished his own food before asking, “How long is this storm Season if summer lasted nearly nine months?”

“Couple of weeks, a month,” Stenn shrugged. “Then it snows for a month or two, followed by another week or two of storms and back to summer.”

Keleb had his eyes closed and murmured, "It does feel like it might storm soon."

He wondered if he felt twitchy because the air was so charged. He was trying to use the meditative techniques to relax, but even with the enervating effect of the heat, he wasn't succeeding.

The weather, he decided, reminded him of summer days on Earth. Where he had grown up, and the weather had been like this – you could guarantee it would storm. He had liked watching storms and liked how the temperature would drop fifteen to twenty degrees in half an hour.

"Kel, Stenn and I are going to..." Jonko was speaking, but Keleb wasn't listening. He was pondering what he would have been doing if he had stayed on Earth.

"Do you want to come?" Jonko finished what he had been saying.

Keleb waved him off and said, absently, "No, I'll be here, resting."

"Don't forget the time," Stenn warned. "Uncle Perrin will be quite unpleasant if we are late to the natatorium."

Jonko went with Stenn, but gave his friend a backward glance.

Keleb thought he must have dozed off for a bit, for he jerked awake hearing a babble of childish voices. He looked to his left and saw a straggling group of toddlers and nurses. He noted, with fascination, that each toddler had a furry object. He guessed they were examples of the local fauna, and judging by the fact that the children were holding them carefully, most hugging them, that the toys were great favourites.

"Come to think of it – I haven't seen a live animal since I've been here," Keleb said to himself. "The kids love the toy ones, why can't they play with the real thing?"

The question puzzled him, and without conscious thought, he stood up and walked after the children. "The twins would probably know. They seem to have an extraordinary knowledge of this weird planet. What the heck is keeping them?"

Keleb grew impatient and remembering the importance Tymos and Kryslie seemed to have within the estate didn't help. Their evaluation would probably be more thorough and take longer. He wanted the answer to his questions and he wanted them now!

"Keleb!" Jonko called. Keleb heard him, distantly, but paid him no heed.

"Kel, we are going to be late for lessons," Jonko tried. He increased his pace to catch up to his friend. "Didn't you hear the hour chime?"

He reached Keleb, and still had no answer.

"Why do you think they don't have real animals here," Keleb asked, showing he was aware of Jonko.

"I don't know! Kel, we will be late. Figure it out later. Come on!"

He tried to drag Keleb towards the natatorium, but his friend shook him off.

"This place is weird," Keleb suddenly commented to Jonko, his voice was oddly harsh.

"Why is that foster brother?" Jonko queried in his soft voice.

"I mean why are we here?" Keleb blurted, trying to put incoherent thoughts into intelligible sentences.

"I can do things now that I could never do before. I can run faster, jump higher and longer, throw things further, swim better and even lift heavier weights..."

"That's what all this training can do and the power we inherited" Jonko spoke calmly.

"Yeah and that's the weirdest part of all!" Keleb poked a finger in Jonko's direction to emphasize the point. "How did they choose me to have it, let alone those two kids Tim and Cindy? There was nothing special about them..."

Keleb continued to ramble on about Earth. Jonko was very concerned. His friend was talking of things he couldn't remember and starting to shout in a harsh grating voice.

"Easy, Kel," Jonko said softly. "Don't talk so loud."

Jonko saw Tym and Krys approaching at a run and was relieved.

"Keleb, Tym and Krys are coming. It's time for our swimming lesson, in the natatorium."

“Huh!” Keleb snorted. “You swim in water, H₂O, not some blue/green gas! We should have floating instruction!” Keleb laughed hysterically.

Jonko looked on helplessly but Tymos seemed to know what was happening and had come up on one side of Keleb and Kryslie was on the other side. Keleb jumped up suddenly.

“He’s been raving,” Jonko explained quickly to the twins. “Raving about Earth – fantastic things that I don’t remember.”

“Go and speak to our instructor,” Tymos insisted quietly, but with a trace of authority in his voice.

Jonko looked startled and alarmed.

“Go on!” Kryslie urged. “Tell them to send someone and hurry!”

Keleb was now shouting louder and louder as Tymos tried to make him be quiet, and he was strongly resisting being restrained by his friends.

The nurses tending the young children had already ushered their charges away from the commotion. The unnaturally harsh voice, shouting strange things had frightened them but away from the noise, the children’s attention soon turned to other things.

“Kel, Stop it! Can’t you see what is happening to you?” Tymos said sharply. He had no effect.

A new voice spoke in a tone that demanded instant obedience.

“Tymos! Kryslie!” the voice said and the named pair turned to face Jono Reslic, while they still restrained their friend. Reslic had two attendants with him.

“Return to you schedule, you are already late!” Reslic commanded.

Tymos and Kryslie released Keleb, bowed in acknowledgement of the order, and immediately transmitted to the natatorium hall where they separated to dress for their swimming instruction period.

Jonko was waiting for them beside the pool. No words were exchanged. Perrin Reslic the President’s brother was supervising the lesson and he instructed the two latecomers to do some warm up exercises and two laps of the pool. The medium into which they lowered themselves was gaseous but many times denser than air. It was not liquid, but an adult could float on its surface. This synthetic medium, known as pseudo-aqua, enabled the students to practice the same manoeuvres that were necessary in water without wasting any water, which was an extremely precious commodity on Tymorea.

The pseudo-aqua was blue-green in colour and some of the stuff did tend to cling to the skin but could be brushed or blown off easily. The gas puffed up as the students moved about in it but would quickly settle and could be swept back into the excavated hollow that was the pool.

Tymos and Kryslie had already learnt several ways of moving across the air/gas interface. The surface crawl stroke and the back float stroke were the easiest, particularly when they made use of their power to lessen their apparent density; it made floating easier. They had also learnt to increase their apparent density so that they could learn to swim within the denser gas. To do this, Tymos and Kryslie had to learn to control their breathing as the denser gas contained insufficient oxygen to breathe normally.

The lesson continued for two hours, after which all students went into the airing room to blow the last of the gas off them. Jonko approached Tymos as they changed back into their usual clothes.

“Should I go and see how Keleb is?” Jonko asked for Keleb had not turned up for the lesson.

“He’ll come when he is ready,” Tymos said wisely. “He may not want company just yet.”

The later part of the afternoon was spent improving athletic skills. Naturally, there was a great deal of competitive rivalry between the different classes but being the best was not the

main aim of the sporting activities. The older ones set a target for the younger ones to equal or better but the emphasis was directed at each person achieving their personal best.

Most of the activities were designed to help the students master aspects of their power and to improve judgment and endurance.

Keleb rejoined his friends as they were trying to master the intricacies of sprint slalom, an activity that involved sprinting between objects over a set course. It required rapid changes of direction, and abrupt changes from running to jumping. Perrin Reslic told him to warm up and try it.

Since he was still feeling fidgety, Keleb thought it would be a good way to work off some excess energy. He could have done what President Reslic had just shown him, and grounded out the excess energy, but he didn't want to try that again, just yet.

He began to run the course slowly. Even that required concentration. It became harder still when Perrin pushed him to increase his speed. He needed to call on his power to increase his coordination. In spite of his reluctance to call on more power, by the end of the session he was tired, sweating and back to feeling calm.

"Hiya, Kel," Tymos greeted as they ran slowly around the slalom course to cool down.

"Hi, yourself," Keleb answered diffidently.

"How about you and Jonko join Krys and me this evening - after the meal?" Tymos invited. "Since our evenings are free once again."

"Yeah, okay," Keleb agreed.

"Tymos?" Keleb asked, after watching Tymos playing 'Strategy' with Jonko for a while.

"Hmm?" was the distracted answer from Tymos.

"Why are there no animals on the estate?" Keleb asked the question that had been bothering him earlier in the day.

"Oh, it is probably because there is nowhere to keep any." Tymos replied, still absently.

"Surely the younger children would enjoy playing with real animals instead of just the furry toys!" Keleb insisted.

Kryslie answered instead of her brother. "It was explained to us that animals used to the world outside often behaved erratically when kept on the Estate. Even tame ones acted strange. Also, some of the youngest children get greatly distressed if they go near animals or where animals have been. They mostly grow out of it but it was decided that animals would not be kept here."

"What are the animals like? Krys?" Keleb persisted. He was satisfied by her explanation of their absence from the estate but he wanted to know more.

"Come on, Kel!" Kryslie chided him. "You know how to use the Compedia. I have no more idea than you do. I've never seen the local fauna either!"

"No, I guess not!" Keleb realized. "I think I will go and see what I can find out."

Keleb ambled out of the room and Kryslie frowned thoughtfully. She considered for a while her friend's preoccupation with animals, a subject she had never given much thought to. Deciding that she lacked data and what she wanted to know couldn't be found on the computer, she left Tymos and Jonko to their game and transmitted to where she knew her foster parents could be found.

Tymoros was relaxing in a comfortable chair, with Llaimos asleep on his lap, listening to the gentle music being produced by the skilled fingers of Tanya on the great harp.

Kryslie came in quietly and went to sit on the arm of her foster father's chair. She loved listening to Tanya playing the harp and had no intention of interrupting. She listened quietly but couldn't resist touching her baby brother's tiny fingers. The little hand caught her finger and held it in an astonishingly tight grip. It was not until Tanya stood up from the harp that Kryslie

thought to ask the question that had brought her there. She watched Tanya lift Llaimos and carefully released her finger and considered how to phrase her query.

“Father?” she decided to be direct. “Is there any reason why Keleb would be so preoccupied by animals he has never seen?”

Tymoros seemed, for a moment, startled by the unexpected question. However, he answered quickly, having already considered that very matter.

“We realized that your friend, Keleb, was unsettled by the children’s furry toys. We are going to test him to see if he has a special empathy with animals. It is a gift that we thought had long since died out.”

“It seems a strange gift to have.” Kryslie commented, inwardly wondering about possible uses for it.

Tymoros seemed to understand what his daughter hadn’t said.

“The animals are in tune with the essence of this world. They always know when something is out of balance in nature. We can learn a lot from them.” Tymoros pointed out.

Kryslie looked thoughtful; she spoke slowly. “It is strange that this gift should appear now. I feel that it is not coincidence, that there is a divine reason, a need ...” The feeling, like a premonition, passed suddenly and Kryslie shook her head as the feeling waned.

Tymoros did not comment. The same could be said of Kryslie and her brother. Why were they born on a world halfway across the inhabited galaxy? Their power almost equal to his own and they had not yet reached their full potential. There was a reason for their birth too.

“I think I might retire and give the matter some thought,” Kryslie decided. She gave her foster father a hug and strolled to her present sleeping room within the suite.

Chapter 26 - Prophecies of the Elders

The hot muggy day become overcast during the early hours of the night. Vapour clouds, thick and heavy with moisture, blotted out the stars; they heralded major atmospheric upheavals.

Guards patrolling the estate grounds felt the electric charge in the humid air and waited for the storm to break. The last lingerers on the terrace moved inside and the lighted windows in all the buildings turned dark one by one.

By midnight only the guards moved on their rounds, and all of them jerked involuntarily when the first brilliant lightning fork and deafening crack of thunder occurred simultaneously.

In that brief flash of light, the guard patrolling the Royal Court saw a child sized figure step out of a ground floor door. For a short time, the guard's night vision goggles were useless, and his eyes were full of glare. When he could see again, the child was gone.

He called the shift leader and while a check was made of the children inside, the guards began to search the grounds.

In their separate sleeping chambers, Tymos and Kryslie woke from deep sleep. They heard the dying rumble of the thunder, and saw flashes of light through the opaque window panels.

With the instinctive awareness they had of each other, they emerged into the main room of the High King's suite and moved together. From a side room, they heard Llaimos begin to wail. Tanya emerged with their brother, and seemed relieved to see them awake.

Kryslie went over and took Llaimos so that Tanya could arrange for the nurse to bring a bottle of infant food for him. As it always seemed, Llaimos quietened as soon as she held him.

"What's the fuss little brother?" Kryslie asked in a confidential whisper. "Did you hear the thunder too?"

The dark blue eyes seemed to focus on her face, even though Tanya had said he was still too young to do that.

Tymos touched his brother's head with its fine down of red hair. "You are safe here, we promise."

Llaimos gave the start of a cry, and then stopped. Several brilliant flashes in quick succession lit the window panel. Kryslie moved over to it and adjusted it to be clear. She watched as lightning flickered from cloud to cloud. Llaimos gurgled as if delighting in the flashes of light. Tymos joined her, as did Tanya, but she only stayed until the nurse returned. Then she deftly retrieved Llaimos for his feed. He began to grizzle softly.

"He has been unsettled all evening," Tanya commented. "It is almost like he is reacting to the unsettled weather."

"I know the feeling," Kryslie agreed.

A chime from the door startled them. Donni, the young man who relieved Aldiv as Tymoros's attendant, emerged from a small room near the door to answer the chime.

"Gianni," Tanya greeted the palace steward.

"Just a quick check, Mam," Gianni said in a low voice. "I needed to be sure your two older children were here. We have had a sighting of a child going outside."

"You can see that we are," Tymos assured him.

"You have checked the nursery and the dormitories?" Kryslie asked.

"Yes, that was done first. None of the children who sleep there are missing. We think the child went back inside, but we must be sure. Sorry to bother you."

Tanya went into another room with Llaimos, and Tymos glanced at his sister.

"I wonder where father is. I doubt that he could have slept through that thunder."

Kryslie shrugged and returned to the window to watch the lightning.

Later, when Tanya re-emerged, she joined them. “Llaimos is asleep. Why don’t you go back to bed? You don’t want to be falling asleep at your lessons.”

“We’ll go,” Kryslie assured her. “Where’s Father?”

Their foster mother’s expression turned sad. “He and his brothers were called to Dira. His father is very ill and not expected to last the night.”

“I would have liked to meet him,” Tymos realised.

“He has not been able to have visitors,” Tanya explained. “And you could not go to him until you have passed level delta.”

Tanya went back to bed, but neither Tymos nor Kryslie were ready to go back to sleep. The lightning outside still held their attention as it flitted from cloud to cloud. Yet when Tanya came out briefly a short time later, they were no longer at the window.

Tymoros arrived back at the palace, and went to his sanctum. He was not yet ready for sleep and was in no mood to sit quietly. He felt he needed to pace and had no wish to disturb his consort. Aldiv, who had been in Dira with him, brought him a drink of mulled wine, before going off to his own room to sleep. He thanked his attendant, out of habit, for his mind was unsettled. His face betrayed the grief he felt, at the passing of his father. His mind was on the prophecy his father had spoken in the few lucid moments before life had left him. The words were impressed in his memory, had been spoken with the force of such sacred visions – but Tymoros doubted that his father had known which of his grandchildren the words referred to. His mind, for years, had been stuck in the past. He had seemed to have forgotten that five of his grandchildren were dead. He had never met Tymos and Kryslie, and possibly did not even remember knowing of them.

A short time later, Donni knocked and entered. “Sire, I am sorry to disturb you, but Armon is here. He says you need to come outside.”

“What is it?” Tymoros asked. At that moment, the weight of his position seemed too much.

“Your children are outside,” Donni told him, as he gathered the cape Tymoros had just discarded. He helped place it back around the King’s shoulders.

Out in the main room of the suite, Tymoros asked, “Where are they?”

“Out on the terrace, Your Majesty,” Armon reported. “My men challenged them, but they do not seem to be aware of us.”

“Donni, take me outside,” Tymoros requested.

Tymos and Kryslie were staring intently skyward, towards where the unstable air masses seemed to be at war. The lightning, flicking from cloud to cloud in fiery flashes, was like some kind of telegraphed message. The rumble of thunder was nearly continuous, and the ground seemed to be trembling.

Tymoros was aware of the power in the storm. He felt it as a vibration in his body. He walked to where his children seemed rooted to the ground, and noticed the silent ring of guards around them. He spoke their names in a voice just audible over the thunder, but they did not react to him. They were alive, he knew, because Kryslie brushed a lock of hair off her face and Tymos half-raised one arm.

Armon, staying next to the King, heard him say, “Bring them to Tanya’s solarium. We can watch the storm from there.” The guard leader directed two guards, via the wireless headsets, to bring the children inside.

The other guards in the protective ring, dispersed to return to their patrols.

In the solarium, the children moved from the beam in point to the window, to keep observing the storm. Inside, the thunder was muted and Tymoros could speak in a normal voice.

Their actions concerned him, as did their lack of reaction to the guards and to himself. He put an arm around each of them, but they were like statues.

“The season is changing, and the days are growing shorter. These storms herald the start of the season of white, when the moisture in the air freezes and settles to the ground.”

Tymoros sighed. His children, though physically beside him, seemed to be part of the tumult outside.

“I can understand your fascination. The storm is a symbol of the wild untameable power of the universe that gave us life and of the creator who created it.”

He fell silent, considering what was affecting his children. His father’s words, had suggested the reason.

“The storm is unusually violent,” Tymos stated abruptly. “There are alien influences at work. The world is protesting.”

Tymoros felt the same power in his son’s words, as he had in those of his father. This was a true prophecy - wisdom from the Guardians of Peace.

Outside, the lightning increased in frequency and brilliance. Tymos and Kryslie still seemed to be seeing messages in the lightning. They answered using an ancient gesture – they opened their arms high and wide and seemed to encompass the storm. In that moment, the tumult outside ceased utterly. Rain began to fall.

Tymoros felt the weight of a heavy burden upon him. His father, Tymori, in the last few moments of his life, had prophesized that these children, and it had to be these two, still young and vulnerable as they were now, would one day be the greatest of the Great Ones of history. It was his task to guide them into wisdom, to keep them safe until they were ready to take up their destiny.

With a quiet word to Donni, Tymoros directed, “Have their attendants come and help them back to bed.”

Armon bowed to Tymoros. “Your majesty, I reported this event to His Excellency and he will leave you to deal with them. Though, if I may ask, are they all right? They look like sleepwalkers.”

“They will be fine, Armon. It is their first experience with our storms. And perhaps sleep walking is what they are doing.”

He believed that the Guardians of Peace had spoken to his children, but it was not yet the time for that to be known. He stayed in the solarium until Delia and Morov had gone off with their charges. Then he nodded to Donni to take him back to his suite.

Tymoros was awake early, and sitting having breakfast when his children emerged from their rooms. He studied them carefully and decided they showed no signs of a disturbed night. In fact, he decided they looked more rested than he felt, and better than they had been looking since Llaimos was born.

“Did the storm disturb you last night?” Tymoros asked casually.

“We woke,” Tymos admitted. “And watched it from here for a bit. I don’t recall going back to bed, though. How is your father? Tanya said he was dying.”

“His passing was peaceful, and he spoke before he died,” Tymoros said. He saw that his children did not understand. “He spoke a prophecy.”

“I have heard that the final prophecies of an Elder are important?” Kryslie remarked.

“The Guardians of Peace bring the visions, and so we consider the words of prophecy carefully,” Tymoros explained. “All the Elders that are able, will be coming here to meditate on my father’s final words. I will be keeping you out of lessons today, so that you may be part of the gathering. You have yet to meet most of the Elders, and they wish to meet you.”

The Elders came from the cities all over the large inhabited continent of Tymorea. They travelled by the long-range beams from city to city, until they arrived at the palace. Most of the Elders were very old, but they all had great depths of wisdom.

They were coming together to meditate on the prophecies of Tymori. His final prophecy foretold momentous events and the coming into power of the new custodians of the Tymorean Trust.

On the highest level of President's Palace, in a room enclosed by a transparent dome and known as the Room of Stars, Tymos and Kryslie waited with Gann Reslic. From there, the Elders who were congregating the Great Hall of the Royal Estate would summon them. Gann, son of President-Governor Jono Reslic, had recently graduated from Level Alpha and he was to join the Elders for time to learn from them the wisdom of the Great Ages of Tymorea.

Gann had brought the High King's children there to wait. From the room's clear windows, they could view the lands outside the estate for great distance in all directions. He used the waiting time to allow Tymos and Kryslie to realise how their power had increased their range of visual perception – a previously unexplored facet of their second stage abilities.

An attendant summoned Gann and he left the High King's children alone and went to take his place amongst the Elders. Tymos and Kryslie waited in silence as they looked out on the world far beyond the confines of the extensive Royal Estate. They felt the first stirrings of an inner knowledge of where their destiny lay and wondered if they were ready to face it.

Tymoros came to escort them though he did not take them to the Great Hall but to the Room of the Seven Ages. This room was in the High King's Palace, on the level below the observatory - with walls filled with micro-murals depicting the history of their world.

Within the room were seats able to be moved to face whichever section of the wall that was of interest to the viewer. Kryslie examined the exquisitely depicted images in one section of the wall until a group of Elders arrived.

Tymoros introduced each of the Elders to his children. Tymos and Kryslie bowed to each of them in the precisely correct degree of respect for these men of high rank. The Elders bowed slightly in return, and seemed to sum them up in a glance, before smiling warmly – expressing their delight in meeting them.

The first group stayed only a short while before returning to the Great Hall. More groups of Elders arrived to meet Tymoros's heirs, until all who had not met them before had been introduced.

Tymoros then took his children down to the Great Hall and left them in the company of the Elders, free to mingle amongst them.

Eighty-seven silver haired men and women attended the meeting. With them were a handful of others still betraying the hair colour of their family line: President Reslic and his son, the blond of the warrior line, Professor Xyron and his two eldest sons, the dark hair of the scientist and philosopher line and the High King with the red hair of the statesman line.

The Elders were wise and gentle people and they had long awaited the chance to welcome these children of the High King. Each knew that the children had been born on Earth and knew with a quiet certainty they were rightfully of the Royal line. They shared with Tymos and Kryslie their belief that the Guardians of Peace had directed their birth under such strange and alien circumstances.

Tymos and Kryslie found a quiet place to observe the mingling of Elders. Although they knew they were welcome to join them, they did not feel comfortable in interrupting any of them. Noticing this, a stately silver haired man approached them.

“Elder Timenon,” Tymos greeted.

The man smiled. “It is a pleasure to realise that you remember my name amongst so many new faces.”

Kryslie had no trouble smiling back. “Father has taught us ways to remember. He says it is an important part of statesmanship.”

“Then you have learnt well, as your father did from me. Ty is my nephew – did you know that?”

Kryslie shook her head.

“It is not unexpected. When becoming an Elder, one no longer claims to belong to any one line of descent. So, I am your Great Uncle and I came to share with you what I learnt of you from my late brother, Tymori. He knew of you many years ago.”

“How is that possible?” Tymos asked. He thought that no one had known of them until shortly before he and Kryslie had come to Tymoros.

“The Guardians knew. I believe they intervened on our behalf, after Isana and Manon died when a trader shuttle crashed. Timenon was still in shock from the news, but he had a vision and shared it with me. I think he knew the moment of your conception, even though it was far from here.”

Kryslie felt a moment of shock. Their father had already suggested that the Guardians had a role in their creation, but it seemed so fantastic. “Uncle, is it because of that link that so much is expected of us?”

“Not at all,” Timenon assured her. “We can all clearly see your potential, and we honour the Guardians by helping all our children to be their best.”

Tymos sighed. “Our duty right now is to learn as fast as we can, or so we are told. And that is because the Guardians might, at any time, give us a task.”

“But we still have so much to learn,” Kryslie echoed her brother’s sigh. “And we have yet to be allowed much responsibility.”

“Surely that is a boon,” Timenon suggested. “It gives you more time for your study.”

“There is that,” Tymos agreed. “We cannot be much use to the Guardians yet, if we are not even allowed to leave the estate.”

“That won’t always be the case. If the Guardians set you a task, they would not expect the impossible from you. I am sure that when the time comes for you to face your destiny, you will be ready.”

“What is to be our destiny?” Tymos asked.

Timenon inclined his head briefly, and spoke quietly. “We have been given our power to serve them. When they need us to act, they reveal that need to us. Often we identify the need from the words of prophecy granted to those of us who are Elders, or those who are closest to the need. We speculate and meditate on the signs they reveal to us. That is why we have gathered today to hear my brother’s final words.”

“I would like to hear Tymori’s prophecy,” Tymos said honestly. “But we might not understand it yet. I am told prophecies can be enigmatic and we have years more learning we need to do. It will be a long time before we are ready to join you.”

Timenon bowed slightly, as if agreeing with what Tymos said. He knew though, that there would not be years of peace for Tymos and his sister to grow into wisdom. Yet he believed that Tymori had spoken truly. These two children, two of three, were chosen by the Guardians of Peace to take over the safekeeping of the Tymorean Trust. Having met them, he now believed, in his innermost soul, that they would not fail. He realised though, that at this time, these young people must not be discouraged by the magnitude of the fight that lay in their future.

And if, for now, they were kept ignorant of their future, it was for their safety and serenity of mind. Their ignorance of any other way, enabled them to learn very quickly. In their training so far, they had never been told that something was beyond their level of skill. In trusting their teachers, they achieved because they believed they could.

Timenon bowed slightly and moved away. Other Elders came in ones and twos, and spoke informally with Tymoros’s children. Tymos and Kryslie spoke little, but listened to the wisdom offered by the Elders, remembering everything for later meditation. They felt accepted by the

Elders and that was encouraging and steadying – a kind of benediction and a mainstay of solid support.

It fortified them when listening to the prophecy of Tymori. The words were a prediction of dire events, of a war so destructive that all Tymoreans needed to work together to protect the world from Armageddon. When mention was made of those who would safeguard the Tymorean Trust, they did not realise that they were to be two of those. “Three would emerge,” was what their father said when speaking of the prophecy.

All the Elders took that as a promise, and it stilled their fear. That they saw two already amongst them was proof of the promise made to the Tymorean people by the Guardians of Peace. In time, the identity of the third would be revealed.

Tymos and Kryslie kept all they had heard in their memory, for it was not yet to be shared beyond the Council of Elders. They returned to lessons the next day with a sense of urgency – the need to learn all they could as fast as they could. They knew the Elders were still discussing the prophecy during the next five days, and from their discussions, plans were made. Tymorean scientists of all disciplines, with access to the sciences of a thousand worlds, had begun to implement the necessary defences. These were of no concern to the students.

On the seventh day after the Elders congregated, they gave their benediction to Llaimos. Tymos and Kryslie attended that rite of blessing, and accepted their role to protect their brother. They had heard, unintentionally, the candid comments of two Elders, who spoke of their thankfulness that they need not fear the safety of Llaimos. He had, they said, siblings who had grown safely to adolescence on a distant world, and were strong enough, stubborn enough and worldly enough to survive any attempt by traitors to kill them.

Kryslie thought back to the intruders, and their leader, and wondered if they were part of the dire things to come. She mentally promised the Guardians that no one would harm Llaimos. Tymos, sharing her thought, vowed that no traitor or enemy would make their father suffer the loss of any more children.

Chapter 27 - Jonko's Gift.

After two weeks of storms, the temperature dropped suddenly from hot and humid, to cold and brisk. Within days of the last storm, the Season of White was entrenched. A mantle of frozen moisture, called zekon, covered the ground and the upper surfaces of the buildings and trees.

The daily routine of the palaces changed subtly in the cold season. The evening and lunch meals were served indoors, in the Great Hall of each palace. There was a greater emphasis on indoor occupations, but the outdoor activities did not cease entirely.

Weapons training continued outside, since fighting in the zekon or snow as it was called on other worlds, might be needed one day. The students learnt how the cold and damp might affect the high tech weapons they were learning to use. It either slowed the response or caused electronic malfunctions. They also learnt that fighting with physical weapons like swords and staves took on a new complexity when one's feet were on icy, slippery mud, and when they were bundled in heavier clothes.

The aim of learning to use weapons in such adverse conditions was to understand different ways that weapons could be used, above and beyond the designers' specifications, and in all possible combinations of circumstance.

The teachers stressed that the emphasis on understanding weapons and weaponry and their tactical use was not primarily for the purpose of attack, unless no other avenue was possible. Nor were weapons necessarily to be used for the first line of defence. Knowledge of weapons was a strategic advantage and perhaps a means to deflect attacks without needing to fight.

It was pointed out that Tymoreans who became missionaries on far-flung worlds might have to use local armaments to hide the special abilities of a Royal Tymorean.

Amongst level epsilon, Tymos and Jonko were by far the best fighters. There was little between them in skill, whether they were using swords or staves, or the high tech personal weapons. Both seemed to have an instinctive mastery of whatever weapon they picked up. Stenn was skilled with all weapons, as a legacy of his heritage, but he was still a degree less adept than these of his classmates.

Kryslie sensed within herself a degree of distaste for fighting with weapons. She excelled at the exercises the students were set, and never spoke against learning to fight. In her mind, there was no reason why she had to fight with weapons once she graduated from learning.

Lessons in unarmed defence and attack appealed to her more for their efficiency and stealth. In the aspects of unarmed fighting, she was the equal and better of her brother and Jonko.

Keleb was noticeably less adept at the use of weapons for fighting than all of his fellow students. Even Lexina and Denlic were skilled enough to satisfy their teachers.

Kryslie, without making an issue of it, tutored Keleb in the skills of defence. She was the only one of his friends that really understood his abhorrence at the thought of injuring another living being. She knew that it came from his empathic gift. For his interest in animals and his ability to attract them and have them respond to him was part of it. He was having special lessons from one of the Elders to understand this gift.

Keleb did not need to verbalise his gratitude to Kryslie, but he did comment, "I doubt that I will ever be as good as you, Kryslie." He referred to their practice in disarming an opponent. "I only manage to get your weapon when you let me."

"Perhaps," Kryslie agreed mildly. "But have you considered that I am making you work harder and harder for each victory?"

"No," Keleb said.

Kryslie had suggested, wickedly, “When you try this next on Jonko or Tymos, they might be surprised. And I think their faces would be interesting to watch.”

Those two students were working out vigorously with two of the finely honed practice blades that had the feel of the real weapons, but would not gravely injure an opponent.

“I doubt that,” Keleb muttered, watching his friends. “When Jonko was warming up with me before, he kept scoring hits on me.”

“Ah, but...that was with you trying to fight by his rules...with a sword. You don’t really want to skewer Jon, and he knows it. This little trick is for when you want to disarm him and fight by your rules, without weapons.”

“So was this what you did to Tymos before?” Keleb’s eyes widened with the realisation. “But you two always seem to know each other’s moves as you make them.”

“Yeah, and that makes it harder. Even when we block each other from our minds, we are aware of each other – I think it is because we are twins. Then I figured out that I could sense the exact moment when I needed to distract him. He still reacts damn fast though.”

“I can’t do that – distract him mentally, I mean,” Keleb commented.

“Mentally, vocally – same thing. Try it on Jonko later, after Tymos wears him out a bit.”

“I don’t think those two want to stop,” Keleb decided, after watching them for a moment.

A short time later, Perrin Reslic called for the students to finish their practice and begin their cool down routine. Lexina, Stenn and Denlic left the target range, going via the armoury to put their equipment away. They returned to join Kryslie and Keleb.

“You four run off,” Kryslie said with her attention on Jonko and Tymos, who were still duelling a short distance away.

Stenn looked in that direction, and to where his Uncle stood, and murmured, “If you can tell Tymos to quit, now will be a very good idea.”

“Something feels wrong,” Kryslie admitted.

“Uncle Perrin can sort it out. My advice is stay out of it,” Stenn said. “We need to cool down before we get under my uncle’s eye.”

Kryslie ignored his advice, though her friends began to trot.

When Perrin Reslic called a halt, Tymos withdrew his blade immediately. Jonko, it seemed, had not heard the instruction and claimed a breach in Tymos’s defence.

“We were told to stop,” Tymos reminded his friend as he leant down to pick up the blade that Jonko had sent flying from his hand.

“No, I beat you! I’ll prove it. Pick up your blade!” Jonko insisted.

Tymos straightened and put out his hand on Jonko’s arm. “It is time to stop.”

In that touch, Tymos sensed that Jonko was having what felt like a childish tantrum. He did not want to stop.

“Damn it,” Jonko swore in the language of Earth. “You want to squib out just when I start to get the better of you!”

“Jon, we were instructed to stop.” Tymos repeated.

“You just don’t want to admit that I am better than you!” Jonko retorted disagreeably.

“Jon, I admit you are good but practice is finished. It will be dinner time in a little while and you know that we will be in trouble if we aren’t presentable then.” Tymos tried to make his friend see sense.

“To hell with dinner!” Jonko said angrily and stalked off, through the zekon, in the direction of the armoury.

Tymos was in two minds about following his friend when he sensed Kryslie by his side.

“Father said his skill with weapons is a gift.” Kryslie told her twin. “There is a psychic aspect to that gift. I sensed it awakening. That is why he is acting so childishly. It is confusion within him. He should not be left alone. Confusion and the precarious control of our power do not go well together.”

“No!” Tymos agreed. He set off at a brisk walk after his friend. Kryslie, left alone, sensed someone looking at her. She expected it to be Perrin Reslic but when she turned, she met the eyes of the President. It was as if he had heard the brief exchange. He nodded at her briefly as if acknowledging both her words and the intuition behind it.

Kryslie watched Jono Reslic until he disappeared into the armoury an area near the large lyceum. It was an effort to restrain herself from becoming involved. If Tymos could not get through to Jonko, then Reslic must do what he knew to be necessary.

“Have you finished your cool down routine,” Perrin Reslic spoke from behind her.

She glanced behind her, recognised the look that implied, “You had better do it without slacking off,” and began to trot around the practice clearing. Her other classmates had finished and were heading back to the palaces to prepare for the evening meal.

As she ran, slowly, she decided that their teacher had summoned his brother – must have seen or deduced what was happening. Then she considered what she had sensed from Jonko, and what Tymos had sensed. Different aspects of the same problem. Tymos sensed the reaction; she had sensed the cause. Yet she could not determine what had set Jonko off, and that bothered her.

So involved was she in her thoughts, Kryslie paid no attention to the fleeting glimpse of the child figure that trotted by behind the guard who had remained to keep an eye on her.

Tymos quickly caught up with Jonko and tried to engage his friend in conversation, keeping the subjects strictly away from the day’s activities. Jonko remained sullenly silent. When they reached the armoury, Jonko turned on Tymos, his face contorted with anger.

“Why won’t you come out and admit I am a better swordsman than you?” Jonko shouted at Tymos.

“I admire your skill, Jon,” Tymos did reply. “I am fortunate to have someone as skilled as you to practice against. You really do extend me.”

“I’m better than you! Admit it!” Jonko snarled.

“I’m not the one to say” Tymos said thoughtfully. “An observer would be a better judge.”

“You...” Jonko did not utter the obscenity but Tymos heard it clearly in his mind.

“Let’s have it out. I’ll prove it to you, here and now. I challenge you... Prince ... to a duel!”

Inside the armoury were racks of weapons – including blades of many different kinds, from many worlds. Jonko replaced the practice blade he had been using and selected two that were razor sharp.

“Jon! We are not permitted to use these!” Tymos protested. His friend did not take the hint.

“Are you afraid, Prince?” Jonko sneered. “Are you a coward?”

“If you want a fight, Jon, so be it!” Tymos said softly, accepting one of the blades. He moved to the cleared centre of the room and faced Jonko. He glanced beyond his friend, seeing the glassed in cabinets holding projectile weapons as well as beam type weapons and was glad that Jonko had not decided on any of those.

It was bad enough that they both only had on the light armoured leathers, covering chest and groin. Tymos knew that this duel was not going to be mere practice.

It was a custom to bow to your opponent before a friendly bout. Tymos followed custom, but Jonko did not. He lunged at Tymos who was barely able to jump back and bring up his sword in defence.

In the intense clash that followed, Tymos aimed only to defend himself. He had no wish to injure his friend. It seemed that Jonko did not share that sentiment. He seemed to be intent on striking his opponent hard. It occurred to Tymos briefly that he was out of his depth. Jonko, uncontrolled had the speed, strength and skill of a madman.

In that fierce battle, Tymos realized the truth of his sister's words. There was a psychic aspect to his friend's skill. Jon, it seemed, could read every move he was planning to make. Tymos knew only his slight speed advantage had prevented him from receiving a nasty wound.

Several times, Jonko forced Tymos back into the doors of the cupboards that held the practice padding and armour. He needed to time a duck under Jonko's offensive moves, and spin quickly to counter the retaliatory lunge. Once Tymos was backed up to the padded benches that doubled as storage for other training equipment. He leapt backwards and up to stand on the bench, lunged in an attacking move of his own, and then leapt back into clear space.

Neither of them gained a clear advantage over the other, but Tymos knew he was tiring and wondered if he could keep Jonko busy until his friend tired or used up the excess energy he had accumulated.

As Tymos began to understand what Jonko was doing, he began to try to predict Jonko's movements. The ability came easily. While still fully occupied in defending himself, Tymos sensed a presence behind him. A part of his mind investigated and realized that the President stood there. The realization that what he and Jonko were doing was not allowed caused him to lose concentration for a moment and Jonko taking advantage of the lapse flicked Tymos's sword from his hand. A fierce grin of exultation appeared on Jonko's face as he aimed his sword at Tymos's chest until it just touched the fabric of his tunic.

"Admit defeat, Prince!" Jonko laughed unpleasantly.

Tymos bowed but did not reply. He wondered why Jonko had not reacted to the presence of the President, even when Reslic stepped up beside him.

"Softling!" Jonko fiercely accused Tymos and he followed that with a string of insults in mixed Terran and Tymorean. Tymos bowed again and still did not reply.

Jono Reslic spoke softly. "Am I to take it that your words apply to me also?"

Jonko noticed Reslic for the first time but his manner did not change.

"You and everyone else!" Jonko did not appear to realize that he had just insulted one of the three most powerful men on Tymorea.

Tymos momentarily saw through Jonko's eyes, saw the face of a stranger where Reslic stood and wondered if Jonko was simply blind to the truth or if Reslic had used his own power to appear different.

"Move aside, Tymos," a soft mental command instructed and Tymos obeyed the will of the President. He walked to one side where he was in shadow. The light from the high windows fell into the centre of the room, where the two duellists were now circling each other.

The sword that Tymos had dropped appeared in Reslic's grip without him leaning over to retrieve it. There was an aura of power in the room.

Reslic moved first and lunged forward, Jonko parried the thrust and the duel began in earnest. Tymos, as an outsider, could appreciate the skill of the two protagonists. That Reslic was the finest living warrior was well known but now Tymos could appreciate the subtle way in which Reslic called on his power to get the utmost out of his art. There was perfect control, absolute precision and a harsh beauty in his performance. By contrast, Jonko looked gawky and uncontrolled, as indeed he was, yet he was determined to prove himself. Reslic was easily parrying all Jonko's attempts at attack and gradually increasing the intensity of his own.

Tymos began to sense when Jonko began to feel afraid and uncertain, when his angry confidence began to fade. The realization came to Jonko of the identity of his opponent. Reslic who was surely aware of the change in Jonko's attitude gave him no chance to back out and apologize for his behaviour. The intensity of the attack never lessened and now Jonko had to defend himself against a man he knew to be enormously more skilled than he was.

Tymos sensed a moment of sheer panic in Jonko, and he pondered Reslic's actions. The President was pushing Jonko to his limits and must surely be trying to get Jonko to call on

something more from within himself. Perhaps it was only by pushing him further towards the point of desperation would it happen.

His friend was learning but it showed only by the gradual change from desperation to confidence. Tymos knew that Reslic had not lessened the intensity of the attacks but slowly Jonko was parrying them more easily and Tymos could sense that Jonko had begun to use his own power.

“Enough!” Reslic said suddenly. He withdrew from the conflict and bowed to his opponent. Jonko returned the traditional bow and waited, sword pointing downwards for Reslic to instruct him further.

“Tymos, a practice bout!” Reslic suggested quietly.

It was a command not a question. Jonko handed Tymos the blade he had been using then stepped back to observe.

The bout began with the traditional courtesies and Tymos quickly found himself under attack. He felt extremely clumsy but Reslic did not give him time to find his power gradually. Tymos knew he was being tested as Jonko had been but he had the advantage of observing his friend calling on his power. Tymos had meditated on many different analogies to help him gain a fine control of his power. His favourite was of a plant drawing moisture from the soil. He used it now but the increase in power was too slow, too gradual. He needed more NOW!

It was almost too much! Tymos reacted with violent and powerful strokes. Reslic parried them with a great deal of skill. Tymos still had control of his power and gradually lessened it, trying to rely foremost on skill. Reslic called a halt a short while later.

“Enough Tymos!” Reslic said quietly, withdrawing with the traditional bow acknowledged by Tymos.

“I am pleased with your control, but you should go now and rejoin your family for the evening meal.”

As Tymos walked apart from the others to transmit to his quarters to change, he heard Reslic speaking to Jonko. “Perhaps you would join me for the evening?”

Tymos was smiling thoughtfully as he changed into clean garments. Jonko had come through well and Reslic would not need to help him much. Jonko had been rebellious but he had not lost control completely. That was indeed good!

Chapter 28 - Breaking Curfew

Tymos arrived late for the evening meal. He glanced around the crowded Great Hall until he spotted the red hair of his twin and wove his way through the tables to reach her.

Morov was immediately beside him. "I will bring your meal, Prince Tymos."

"Thanks," Tymos said as he found a seat at the table with Kryslie, Keleb and unexpectedly, Tymoros.

His father was leaning back, relaxed and smiling, so he was not about to mention the unsanctioned duel – if he knew of it yet.

"Tym, guess what?" Kryslie greeted him by rising to her feet and leaning forward over the table. She didn't give her brother a chance to speak. "We are to go with Father on his next Royal Tour."

Tymos felt the same excitement rising in him as affected his sister. "When?"

"So we get to Dira before the next season of storms," Kryslie explained. "The Elders go there then to meditate. We are to join them."

Tymoros, smiling, interrupted. "There are certain conditions though, as I have explained to Kryslie. You both must pass level delta before then. That means you must work hard this season."

Keleb, slightly envious at the opportunity his friends now had, added with a grin of his own, "That will be hard, Tymos, when your heart is outside in the beautiful zekon making balls to throw at your sister!"

"Indeed," Tymoros agreed. "And when he is distracted by the need to dodge others."

Tymos pretended to groan and then asked, "How long are we to be away?"

"Well, we have to leave here to get to Dira before the storms, and that city is...?" Kryslie turned to her father.

"Four days away, by carriage," Tymoros supplied.

"And we will be there for the second season of storms," Kryslie went on.

"After that, we will do a sweep of the nearer cities," Tymoros explained. "We will stay a day or two in each one. Sometimes we will travel by carriage, and sometimes we will take the long-range beams to get from city to city. That way you will get to see some of the smaller settlements – the towns and villages. You will be back here about forty days after the coming of the new sun."

"I can't wait!" Tymos exclaimed.

Tymoros rose from his seat. "Incentive to work hard," he remarked before excusing himself to return to his suite.

Keleb felt like an outsider as Tymos and Kryslie discussed the tour. He looked relieved when Jonko joined them as the hall was being cleared.

"You eaten, Jonko?" he asked.

"Yes, with the President. What's with those two?" Jonko asked.

"Don't ask! They'll start all over again."

Tymos proved he was aware of them. "We're to go with Father on his next tour," he explained, and went on to tell Jonko what he knew.

Keleb inserted, "It gives them less than five weeks to pass level delta. They won't have time to show their faces until then."

Jonko gave a faint grin of agreement. "What's so important about Dira?" he asked as he sat down in a spare chair.

Tymos explained, "The Temple of Creation is there and it is the most ancient of the cities. That is why the Elders go there to meditate and teach their wisdom to young ones like us."

"I could do with a bit more of that," Jonko admitted ruefully. He didn't admit the reason but his friends guessed. "So you won't really be away long."

"No, it is only to be a short journey," Tymos confirmed. "And even if we went everywhere by long range beam, we couldn't visit all the cities. There are about a hundred of them, along with all the towns and tiny hamlets around each one. Too many to visit in the short time they will allow for us to have away from our studies."

"Part of the reason is that they don't want us to go too near the mountains," Kryslie added.

Jonko saw the subtle change in expression on the faces of both Tymos and Kryslie. "There is danger in the mountains?"

"Yes," Tymos admitted tersely. Then he shrugged as if trying to play down the danger. "Those intruders that came here rode horses. They tethered them to trees on the forest edge. The road guards backtracked the horses trail towards the mountains. Two of the horses were ridden off from here, but the trail ended abruptly. It is likely that the intruders were picked up by some kind of small aircraft."

Keleb sensed that wasn't all of it. "That's not the only reason. There is something else too."

Tymos nodded, and considered the wisdom of passing on the reason. "There's no real need for you to know, or not to know. They have sent several groups of the Peace Corps to search the mountains. The first two groups brought back mutants, and found evidence of an alien ship having landed and left. A third group went to do a more thorough sweep of that area of the hills. They reported their arrival, and then nothing has been heard for ten days."

"They were looking for those intruders," Jonko guessed.

Kryslie nodded. "Father thinks that the mutants have formed an alliance with the intruders, and that the intruders are aliens."

"Oh," Jonko said, concerned. "I don't like the sound of that at all."

"You don't need to worry," Tymos commented. "We are safe here. The protections have been strengthened."

"True enough," Jonko agreed. "But you will be going off the estate. And if this tour is a regular event, and they know you are going..."

Kryslie shivered. "How would they know?"

"Spies?" Jonko proposed, but he realised the Kryslie's attention was no longer on him. He saw Tymos react to something unspoken, for he suddenly looked away towards the door of the hall, and then at Kryslie who was rising from her seat and staring in the direction Tymos had glanced.

Tymos gripped her wrist and held it tightly. His eyes met those of his sister, and Jonko was sure they were communicating.

Kryslie wrenched free, and moved to a clear space and transmitted away.

"What's wrong," Jonko asked. Both he and Keleb rose from their seats when Tymos did.

"No time to explain," Tymos brushed the question aside and moved away to transmitted after his sister.

Tymos used his empathic awareness of his sister as his reference to transmit. She was standing in the dark, on ice-covered grass, turning slowly and peering into the darkness. She had told him only, "Someone is in trouble. Outside."

Tymos tried to stop her, knowing the dangers of being out in the dark, alone, as well as she did, but she was not hearing him.

"Who was it, Krys? And what is the trouble?" Tymos asked in a quiet voice.

"I am not sure," Kryslie admitted. "Call it a call for help. It wasn't a coherent thought. It was a mixture of disgust, shame, desperation and...a desire to die."

Tymos remembered a similar thought, aimed at him. "Krys, was it directed at you?"

"No, I am sure it wasn't," Kryslie spoke after a moment of consideration. "It was one of us, not one of those alien intruders. I am sure of that."

“Someone like Zacary?” Tymos suggested. He felt Kryslie go tense. “Krys, it’s after curfew. If those aliens are trying to get at another of us – this might be a trick to lure us somewhere alone. We should go back and get the guards.”

“And let that creature win?” Kryslie challenged him. “No. Trust me, bro. This wasn’t a thought aimed at us and I am sure that we need to look for whoever did send that thought. It was very weak, hardly coherent. I think whoever sent it, is out here in the zekon, and does not want to be found. We haven’t got very much time to find him.”

Tymos stopped speaking, and let Kryslie mentally listen for the faint presence she had sensed. If this was a trick to get them, he was not going to let his sister go on her own.

“Come on,” Krys urged her brother. “Over towards the armoury.”

“What? Why there?” Tymos queried.

“I just recalled something I saw, after you went off after Jonko,” Kryslie explained as they ran. “I was doing my cool off, and thinking about Jon. One of the children ran past, behind the guard. At the time, I probably thought he was on an errand. I think it was Sacul.”

“Krys, we have to let the guards look for him. Don’t you see? It’s like Zacary. He was convinced to drop me in a hole. Perhaps whoever influenced Zacary, has done the same to Sacul and they expect us to react.”

“Tym, it isn’t the same. He doesn’t want to be found – he’d rather die. If we don’t find him, the guards won’t. If we call him, he might answer. He trusts us.”

“We should check he didn’t return to his dormitory,” Tymos suggested. “Stay here. I will be right back.”

Tymos went directly to the area where the older children slept. The ones like Sacul whose parents were missionaries and living away from Tymorea. He did not use the beam in point, and didn’t turn the light on in the dark room. Instead, his eyes adjusted subtly so that he could use frequencies other than the visible to look around. All the beds were empty; it was not yet the official bedtime for these older children but there was a chance that Sacul might have crept into his bed to hide. To be sure, Tymos checked under the bed, in Sacul’s cupboard, and in his clothes press. As he thought about talking to the dormitory attendant to see if Sacul had reported sick, he heard his sister’s mental voice.

“Tymos, I’ve found him.”

When he transmitted to her new location, he found Kryslie on her knees with her head under some dense foliaged bushes. He didn’t wait to be asked to help; he knelt beside her, ignored the freezing ice under his knees and used his hands to try to move the solidifying ice around the younger boy. His hands were numb with cold by the time they had him free of the ice. Together, they half lifted, half dragged Sacul out onto the zekon covered grass.

“He’s in a bad way,” Kryslie said as she felt the coldness of Sacul’s skin. “We need to get him to the infirmary.”

Tymos was taking off his jacket to wrap around the boy, and after doing that he lifted him over his shoulder. The boy’s weight was no problem, as it was he was small for twelve years old.

“We’ll need to be quick. Our own activities have been noted,” Tymos warned Kryslie.

Kryslie glanced down at the blinking purple light on her monitor. They were being summoned to see President Reslic. She knew they should answer the summons immediately – but they had to help Sacul.

“You take him, Tym. I will explain things to his Excellency,” Kryslie decided.

Tymos moved a few feet away and tried to transmit. “Damn! We aren’t able to move more than just ourselves.”

“Guards!” Kryslie called loudly. Then she spoke quietly to her brother, “They aren’t far away.”

Men wearing dark clothing and visible only due to the tiny red and green point lights on their night goggles arrived moments later, and formed a circle around them. They activated dull lights that made them silhouettes against the faintly luminous zekon.

“Prince Tymos, Princess Kryslie,” the leader of the group greeted them, neutrally. He walked closer and asked, “You summoned us?”

“We have a sick child, Armon.” Tymos had recognised the gruff voice of the Guard Leader.

“We will tend to him, Prince Tymos,” Armon spoke aloud. He sub-vocalised into his head set and one of his companions came and lifted Sacul from Tymos’s shoulder. He moved aside and transmitted away.

Armon spoke again. “I should thank you for finding him. We have been searching unsuccessfully since before dusk. Now, I expect I don’t have to tell you that you have broken the curfew. May I have the honour of accompanying you both when you answer your summons?”

“Honour, Armon?” Kryslie asked lightly, but with a grim smile on her face that the guardsmen wouldn’t see, even with their detection equipment.

Tymos was equally composed when he remarked, “No doubt our monitor signals alerted you to our presence here. I am glad, for Sacul’s sake. You will wish to have our transmitters? I do not expect to be treated any different to other miscreants.”

“That is the protocol,” Armon agreed, accepting the two transmitters and stowing them in his utility pouch. He sub-vocalised again, and the other guards began to move away as Armon transmitted Tymos and Kryslie to the President’s Palace. Once there, Armon led them to the President’s formal office.

Yeven admitted and announced them, then withdrew.

Reslic turned from the window, and sat down in his chair. He leant back and listened to Armon’s report, as he studied the two children standing at attention before him. Neither seemed resentful, nervous, resigned, or rebellious.

“Thank you Armon. I will take things from here,” Reslic directed, and turned his full attention on the children in front of him. Armon bowed, turned and strode from the room.

He continued his scrutiny for what seemed like a long time, but neither Tymos nor Kryslie changed their neutral expressions. He sensed nothing from them, and noted they were putting his lessons on shielding their minds to good effect.

“Why?” he asked with abrupt sharpness.

Kryslie relaxed her stance slightly to meet his gaze. She knew his terse question was, “Why had they gone out after curfew?”

While she considered how to phrase her answer, Reslic stood up and came around his desk.

“I had to. I felt Sacul’s life slipping away. He didn’t want to die, not really, but he felt he had no choice,” Kryslie stated her belief with out sounding defiant. As an after thought, she added, “Sir.”

“Why did you not speak to the guards before you went off?”

“It wasn’t that clear cut, Sir,” Kryslie told him flatly. “He didn’t want the guards to find him, but he trusted me.”

“He was unconscious,” Reslic pointed out.

“Not when I first felt his mind,” Kryslie insisted.

Reslic accepted that and changed the topic. “It could have been a trap – to lure you out alone. To lead you out into some danger. There are other races in the universe with psychic powers and not all are friendly.”

“I know that! Tymos felt one. The leader of those intruders was another. This didn’t feel like that sort of mind.”

“Remember this,” Reslic said sharply. “That intruder met you, probably learnt things about you, and has probably tried to influence others before...you haven’t had experience with such subtle warfare. Always be wary of such callings.”

Kryslie didn't drop her eyes. "You are right, of course, Sir," she admitted. "I was wary. It was not until I recalled seeing Sacul running off alone that I knew who called."

"Have you anything to add, Prince Tymos?" Reslic switched his glare.

"Kryslie was right. She knew it might also have been a trick – like the thoughts I had directed at me. And I went to check that Sacul hadn't slipped back to his bed." Tymos paused and added, "And you will recall that Kryslie could tell the minds of the intruders from those who live on the estate."

It was clear from his stance and direct return gaze, that Tymos was backing his twin.

"Indeed," Reslic allowed. "But do you recall Zacary? Even with our precautions, a mind such as that alien intruder influenced him to try to harm you, Prince Tymos."

"We couldn't sense things so well then," Kryslie commented. "We hadn't reached second stage."

"That was not my point, Princess Kryslie," Reslic spoke harshly. "The point is that someone, one of our own perhaps, might have been trying to get you both alone."

"We considered that, Sir," Kryslie stated.

"Good, at least you understand. None of us like to think that will happen, but it isn't impossible," Reslic told them and then added severely, "I will not allow either of you to risk yourselves."

Tymos said flatly, "We will not be children much longer. You cannot confine us here forever."

"You have not graduated yet, Prince Tymos," Reslic stressed, not reacting to the implied challenge.

He turned his attention back to Kryslie. "Should such a situation arise again, and you don't wish to bring it to my attention - you should go to your father. Both of you are particularly sensitive to the psychic aspects of our power, and of the three of us who are Governors, he is the one most aware of the subtle nuances of it."

Kryslie looked down, not because she felt guilty or reproved, but because she still believed that she had acted correctly. Reslic took her chin in his hand and gently lifted her face. "Do you understand? Will you abide my instructions in future? There are others here who are trained to deal with such psychic matters."

"I understand," Kryslie admitted, not betraying her mental reservations.

"You have been here long enough to know the reason for having a curfew, and why we enforce it so strongly."

Kryslie did not answer; she had sensed a fleeting image in Reslic's mind, of two lifeless red haired children and felt his controlled grief. She knew her twin had shared that vision, through her mind. They both knew whose children they had been. Tears came unbidden to her eyes. It was the thought of causing more grief to her father that finally made her defiance slip away.

Reslic dropped his hand, realising that Kryslie had sensed something he had thought well shielded.

"I am not denying that your motives were well meant," he said, turning away. He couldn't deny they spoke the truth either. "I cannot treat you differently to other curfew breakers. Come back and see me before your lessons tomorrow. Yeven will take you back to your apartments." Reslic looked away, and Kryslie glanced at her brother since he wasn't looking at them. "Yes Sir," she agreed and Tymos echoed her. Neither delayed making their departure.

Yeven was waiting outside the office, and must have known he'd be needed. Tymos forced a grin at him.

"Could we prevail on you to take us back to father's suite?"

"Of course, Prince Tymos," Yeven agreed gravely.

On his return, Yeven slipped into speak to Reslic. “Is there anything more that you require, Sir?”

“No thank you. If I need anything, I will have Montel, come.”

“I will have him bring you a drink of wine, Sir,” Yeven suggested.

“If you think I look like I need it,” Reslic agreed.

“I know you, Sir,” Yeven reminded him as he bowed and retreated.

Reslic thought on his interview with the High King’s children and spent moments reinforcing the shields on certain memories. They had come unbidden when he touched Kryslie’s face. He knew she had sensed them and understood what she saw.

Montel, his night attendant brought in the warmed wine he liked and then withdrew. Reslic sipped the drink and wondered if something like this night’s events had happened sixteen years back, causing those younger children to break curfew and not be found until too late. He still felt he had failed, back then, to protect Ty’s children. Time had not eased the grief of that long ago night. It still roused anger in him. That was why he had not set the penalty for breaking curfew – but left it until the morning. He did not wish his anger at himself to colour his judgement, and in spite of her unrepentant defiance, Kryslie’s motives had been of the highest merit.

Despite going to bed late, and having their usual interrupted night, alternating with each other to get up when Llaimos woke for feeding, Tymos and Kryslie were awake early. They dressed and transmitted to the infirmary to visit Sacul.

Madame Teena, the senior nurse, allowed them into the room where Sacul was sleeping.

“How is he?” Tymos asked quietly.

“We treated him for hypothermia and are alert for signs of pneumonia or other infections,” Madame Teena assured him. “When he wakes, Rogert, our senior psychologist will talk to him. We expect him to make a full recovery.”

Kryslie moved close enough to take one of Sacul’s limp hands in her own. The boy’s eyelids fluttered as if he was on the verge of waking up. She sensed his fleeting awareness of her and patted his hand. “Get well, Sacul. We’ll talk when you are better.”

Madame Teena shooed them out, but they did not protest. They still had their morning duty of the nursery inspection. Only this morning they would not have time to play with the children since they would need time for breakfast and to see the President, before their morning lessons.

From the nursery, they went to the Great Hall where the servants were finishing preparing the tables for breakfast. Delia found them there and organised trays of cereal and toast for them. However, once they sat at a table, their appetite deserted them.

“How long do you think we will lose free movement for?” Kryslie asked her brother. She hadn’t started to eat her cereal, just stirred it around in the milk.

“Three days is usual,” Tymos mused aloud. “Stenn was grounded for a week, for trying to help us that time.”

“That isn’t the same as breaking curfew,” Krys countered. “Though he could’ve put himself in danger.”

“So maybe a week,” Tymos thought aloud. “You weren’t exactly sorry for doing it.”

“We saved Sacul’s life,” Kryslie said flatly.

“I know, and as far as I am concerned, any penalty is a small price to endure for that,” Tymos told her.

“And I won’t say I won’t do the same thing again, in the same circumstances,” Kryslie warned. “If I had gone to father or someone else first, and waited to find them and convince them, the faint flicker of thought I had would have been gone. No one would have found him by just looking. I had to act quickly.”

“You don’t have to convince me,” Tymos assured her. “I backed your choice because it was right. I’d do the same again. And if someone was trying to get at you, they’d have a rude shock to discover there are two of us.”

Kryslie sent her brother a wordless sense of gratitude and tried to force herself to eat.

Tymos echoed her reluctance, “I’m not hungry.” He was thinking uneasily about the coming interview, in spite of what he said. He hoped that Reslic would not decide they were not ready to go with their father on the tour. The problem was that he had never heard of Reslic delaying setting a penalty for a curfew infringement.

Acting together, they took their untouched breakfasts towards the servery. Delia and Morov intercepted them and took the trays. Delia gave them a look of concern, which they ignored as they went to the beam in point.

Before they transmitted to the President’s palace, they checked each other’s appearance, straightened their clothing, tidied their hair and took a deep breath.

They had, without consulting each other, donned their formal uniforms. Tymos was in purple and gold, and Kryslie was in red and gold. If asked, they would say it was to remind themselves of the responsibility of their position and rank. Any questioners could draw their own conclusions from that. In fact, it was a subtle gesture of defiance. They both believed they had acted correctly and in accordance with the expectations of their rank. Or rather, the expectations of that rank once they were fully trained and adult.

They went to the small antechamber outside the President’s office to await his summons.

Chapter 29 - Kryslie's Gift

The interview was brief and impersonal. For breaking curfew, they received a penalty of three days loss of personal freedom. Or as Stenn put it, they were 'grounded'. They already knew that meant they would be without their personal transmitters for that time.

Reslic detailed other aspects. "One of the palace guards will transmit you to and from your lessons. Except for lessons, you will spend your time in your separate apartments. You will have your meals there, and undertake the extra work you will complete. However, you may continue to sleep in Ty's suite as you are doing."

He received two nods, and both Tymos and Kryslie accepted the restrictions.

"One final stipulation," Reslic remarked, fixing them both with a sharp gaze. "The extra work must be completed individually. In particular, the meditation exercises. I do not want you collaborating on them – mentally or verbally. I would like to hear your individual thoughts on those subjects."

Tymos nodded. "Fine, Sir."

Kryslie almost shrugged to avoid answering, but quickly thought again. She was in enough trouble and didn't want to add being disrespectful to the list. Although Reslic had not commented on the formal dress, she knew he had interpreted their meaning.

"If that is what you require, Sir," she agreed evenly. In her own mind, she told herself that she didn't need to be in telepathic contact with Tymos to know what he thought.

They had to go directly from seeing Reslic to their lessons. The appointed guards awaited them in the anteroom when Reslic dismissed them.

On their arrival in the large lyceum, Stenn saw them arrive and his eyebrows went up into his shaggy hair. He knew what the escorts meant. He gave them a faint smile and saw it returned.

The morning's instructor placed Tymos and Kryslie apart from each other and the rest of their group. Stenn whispered an explanation to Jonko and Keleb. Each of the other members of level epsilon, at various times when they were not being observed, either winked or smiled sympathetically – tacitly giving them support and encouragement.

In their apartments during the lunch break, Delia and Morov brought a solid meal without being asked, and spoke as little as possible to their charges. Neither attendant knew exactly what trouble they had got into – only that they had been 'grounded'. Delia's pursed lips made her disapproval quite plain; she expected better from her charge. However, her disapproval eased when Kryslie made a start on the extra work.

Morov merely hid a faint smile of sympathy. He knew what it was like to be grounded.

At least, the afternoon's instructors treated them as usual, and some quiet conversation was possible. Stenn asked what they had done, but was only told they broke curfew. Stenn gave them a look of pained patience.

"I suppose you had to try it," he muttered before his uncle glared at him.

Tymoros had not been in the suite the evening before when they had been 'delivered' by Yeven. Tanya had seen them arrive, had guessed the reason, but made no reference to the cause. This evening, Kryslie had asked Delia to bring her to the High King's suite when she was ready for bed. Her attendant was less disapproving, for she had heard that she had helped save Sacul. Tymos came in with Morov a few moments later.

Tymoros was sitting in his favourite padded chair, waiting for them.

"Good night, Father," Kryslie said quietly as she went to walk past him to her sleeping room.

“Wait a moment,” Tymoros directed, and she stopped but did not look around. When Tymos walked closer, he said, “Come and sit with me.

Tentatively, they took seats either side of him.

“Jono tells me that you saved young Sacul’s life. Well done,” Tymoros commended. Then he asked, “Why didn’t you come to me? And why did you go rushing out on your own?”

Kryslie sighed, “There didn’t seem enough time.”

“Do you not recall that I said I trusted your instincts?” Tymoros chided gently. “I have not changed my mind.”

“We didn’t know where to find you, either,” Tymos added in support of his sister. “You have been very busy this past week.”

“Is that what is bothering you? That I wasn’t around to help you?”

“No,” Kryslie protested. “We did what we felt we needed to do. The rest...having restrictions...isn’t important.”

“Then what is?” Tymoros asked. He felt his daughter had just confirmed Reslic’s contention that she would break curfew again if she felt it justified.

Tymos found the words for what Kryslie wanted to say. “It’s the ‘what if’ we were wrong, and we were tricked out into the garden,” he explained. “Like those others were. We don’t want to cause you more grief.”

“I see,” Tymoros admitted. He put his arms around both of them and drew them close.

“What did happen to them?” Kryslie asked quietly. “I know they died and they were still very young.”

She nestled closer to her foster father, as he recalled that time of grief.

“We don’t know, exactly. Even in hindsight. Perhaps it was like you last night, or perhaps they were lured out there into the garden. We found them, dead, near the boundary fence, hands locked together. There was no sign of violence.”

“What killed them?” Tymos asked. “Cold? Like Sacul?”

“No. When they were examined, it was as if their bodies had mutated. Oh, they looked as they had, but their cells were...like they had received a massive dose of radiation.”

Tymoros’s voice was unsteady as he added, “Jassi was eleven and Verdi was ten. They had both just reached, second stage – both had tremendous potential.”

“And then Isana and Manon died,” Tymos thought at his sister. “And we were conceived.”

Kryslie pulled away from Tymoros a bit and said, deliberately, “Well, we are not that innocent and not so virtuous. And if people can’t accept that - too bad. We know the world isn’t perfect. We know aliens exist and they don’t know us, even if they think they do.”

Tymoros looked at Kryslie in a new light. She saw his interest and stated, “Even if we don’t remember it, we grew up as humans. That means we have instincts that are not like those who grew up here.”

Or as Reslic had described them to his fellow Governor, “Two stubborn and determined young mavericks.”

Tymos finished Kryslie’s thought. “That makes us somewhat unpredictable, and they won’t realise that there are two of us that think like one.”

Llaimos chose that moment to wake again. “My turn,” Tymos remarked, rising.

Kryslie hugged Tymoros again. “They won’t get the better of us, and we won’t let them harm Llaimos,” she vowed. She pulled free and stood up. “I’d better get some sleep.”

Tymoros let her go, and watched Tymos with his youngest son. This time, he didn’t go over to hold Llaimos. He was thinking of what Tymos had said to Reslic - the statement that they wouldn’t be children much longer. He recognised it as a foretelling. It was quite true that Tymos and his sister were not like any of his dead children. Oh, the resemblance was there, but they were not as compliant, obedient or as naïve as his own children had been. Reslic found them a challenge. Fortunately, they were not aware of how powerful they had become, and they were

still respectful of their elders – except for occasional clashes. They were compassionate and had good sense, and those traits governed them and restrained them from greater clashes of will.

After the end of the second day, Tymos and Kryslie had both realised that even such a short period of restriction was not as easy to tolerate as they had thought. They had not realized how much they appreciated and needed the social interaction during the day and evening. Without it, they felt like they had non-stop lessons and their minds were going fuzzy. The additional lessons their teachers had set for them to complete were time consuming and required a great deal of thought.

Tymos found faint amusement in an admission Stenn had made. He claimed that occasional ‘grounding’ events gave him a break from his ten siblings. But he didn’t feel that way about Kryslie. She was a part of him, and he was aware of her even when they were not in physical or mental contact with each other. It was an effort to keep shielded against her. He likened it to being in a room full of mirrors and being forbidden to look at his reflection.

Still, he didn’t resent the restrictions, even that one. With the need to hurry to pass level delta, the teachers were going to give them extra work anyway. Having a reason to avoid distractions was an advantage to getting it done.

By the third evening, despite his resolve and seeing usefulness in the restrictions, he felt like rebelling. He had finished the work, but not yet put enough thought into the meditation subject Reslic had proposed for him. He was alone in his apartment, and his talk with Reslic was only two hours off.

He was trying to meditate, but his mind was still drifting to his sister. He wanted to discuss ideas with her, even if it were forbidden. To his deepest senses, what he privately called the ‘twin bond’, he felt Kryslie was unsettled and he made an effort to calm himself, and hoped she would calm as well.

The calm lasted only five minutes, until Kryslie’s agitation broke through, and he was echoing it. Deliberately, he lowered his mental shields and reached out for her mind.

She wasn’t thinking of him, or her work, but she was concentrating on something. Tymos had an overpowering need to go to her, but the guard outside his door would stop him and he did not have his transmitter. He might be able to convince the guard that something was wrong - but not while he was under restrictions. It made the guard seem like a gaoler.

Kryslie had conscientiously applied herself to the tasks she had been set, and finished the lesson work by the second day. The meditation exercise she saved for the last day, as she usually found such exercises relaxing. This time though, it seemed tedious and she couldn’t concentrate. Nor could she sit still. She felt the need to pace around her apartment and jumped at the slightest sounds. Above all that, she felt the need to be elsewhere.

At first, she thought it was a reaction to being restricted, and having to keep out of her brother’s mental contact.

No doubt, she decided, Reslic wanted to emphasise his belief that they needed to be less dependent on each other.

After a while, she recognised the growing uneasiness within herself as reminiscent of the urgent need she had felt three nights ago that had led her to Sacul. Having made that connection, she analysed the feeling and became sure. Sacul was wordlessly crying out for help again, but she could not go to him. It was as if his precious life force was ebbing away.

Unconsciously her fingers went to her temples in a gesture of concentration. When she closed her eyes a vision came to her of Sacul, awake but growing weaker. Instinctively, she directed her mind to the mind of the child, knowing somehow that she could help him.

Madame Teena sent an urgent message summoning Professor Governor Xyron. When he arrived, she led him to Sacul. The child was pale, his skin clammy and his dull eyes stared up at the roof. His breathing was so shallow it had almost stopped.

Xyron drew out a portable diagnostic tool and scanned Sacul from head to toe. He looked at the read-out and then back at the child. His free hand went to the child's forehead and in that contact, he could feel the child's life energy ebbing away.

"Bring him to the critical care section," Xyron instructed, hiding his feeling of helplessness.

His assistants connected Sacul to the life supporting machines, which would only delay the inevitable. This had happened before. Seven times in the past decade, children with no detectable signs of illness had gone from normal and healthy to dead in a few days. Each had been on the verge of the power's second stage. Each death was inexplicable.

Xyron activated the more sensitive scanning equipment, and listened to the muted hums and beeps of the life-signs monitors. When the brainwave monitor changed its tone, Xyron placed his hand on Sacul's forehead again. He felt power at work; power that lacked training, was tentative in its action and was feeling its way.

Then he checked the monitors again and saw that Sacul's condition had stopped worsening.

"Summon Reslic and Tymoros," Xyron instructed his assistant. He continued to watch the monitors and sense the action of the power in Sacul's mind.

The two other Governors arrived within moments and listened to Xyron's terse report.

"Another one, and still no reason why?" Tymoros asked grimly.

"Yes, but something has stopped this one. Sacul is getting no worse."

Reslic placed his hand where Xyron's had been.

"Kryslie!" Reslic said suddenly. "She heard the child call out and found him in the zekon."

He glanced at Tymoros and they transmitted to Kryslie's suite.

Kryslie was oblivious to everything around her. Her hands, balled into fists and pressed against her forehead, were glowing purple as she fought from a distance the compulsion that made Sacul want to die.

Even when Tymoros transmitted Kryslie to the infirmary, she did not move. Her mind was focussed on the child. In that moment of contact, he felt the power in Kryslie, building up but still controlled. She was struggling to maintain control of the power and to direct it to her will.

Reslic gently took one of Kryslie's hands, opened it from the balled fist and placed it on Sacul's forehead. Tymoros did the same with her other hand, but placed his hand over hers to provide a regulating effect. He could sense what Kryslie was doing, and the results were visible on the monitors. She was manipulating, very delicately, Sacul's brainwaves. Too much power would kill the child, too little and the child would continue to will himself dead.

Kryslie concentrated on Sacul for a long time, fighting for every minute improvement.

"I know I can do this," Kryslie said desperately. "But he is fighting me."

Tymoros spoke softly into her ear. "Have you told him who you are and what you are doing?"

Kryslie thought about that and suddenly knew what was happening.

"Sacul, I am Kryslie, remember me? You are one of my first and best friends and you helped Tymos plan ambushes on me with the children in the nursery, remember?"

Kryslie felt a flash of interest and kept thinking at the child.

"I can help you Sacul. I know how to free you from the alien taint, but you have to trust me – will you?"

A tentative sense of reaching out – a wild creature, ready to flee.

"Remember, Sacul? I helped you call your parents on your 13th birthday. They are so proud of you."

There followed an intense swirl of emotion and a wave of suicidal despair.

"Sacul, I will not let them win! They could not control me – I will not let them control you!"

Tentative hope.

“Take my hand,” Kryslie directed, taking one of Sacul’s limp hands in her own.

Reslic spoke quietly so Kryslie could hear.

“His power is rising; you need to draw it from him.” In his mind was they way to do it.

Kryslie followed the advice, picturing Sacul’s power as a trickle of water, but in her mind, it changed to a writhing green serpent.

“Allow it to flow through you and back into the child,” Reslic advised. “You have the will to cleanse it.”

The writhing serpent image, tried to overcome her, but she imaged a glowing purple serpent, twisting with it, strangling it. The green tinged power kept coming, wanting her for her greater life force.

Kryslie eased her grip on the imaged serpent and it writhed faster, thinking that she was weakening. When the power flowing from Sacul seemed purple, Kryslie lifted her hand from the boy and shook both hands free of the Governor’s. She heard the power buzzing in her head and let the sound grow to be like a swarm of wild bees then grounded out the power through the image of the writhing green serpent. In her mind, it blazed in a flare of incandescent purple flame, blackened and became ash.

Kryslie opened her eyes and looked at Reslic.

“All is well,” she said.

Kryslie looked then at Sacul, saw colour returning to his face and heard him take a deep breath.

“Sacul, wake up. You do not need to be afraid any more.”

She saw the child close his eyes more tightly.

“No one is angry with you,” she assured him in a gentle voice. “That which you feared, is gone.”

Tears leaked from the closed eyes.

Kryslie embraced the child and helped him into a sitting position. “The taint is gone.”

“I wanted to die,” Sacul whispered. “I didn’t want to do what the voice said.”

“You could have asked for help,” Kryslie told him.

“I didn’t want to be punished,” Sacul admitted still very quietly. “The voices started after I crept out one night when there was a really big storm. Titus dared me. I thought I was going crazy. The voices wanted me to do bad things. I said, no, but I found myself doing them.”

“What things?” Kryslie asked.

“Taking things, lying about it, hurting little ones and scaring them so they wouldn’t tell on me. I’d sneak into places where I wasn’t meant to be.” Sacul whispered, but Kryslie sensed this wasn’t all and not the worst of it.

“Go on,” Kryslie encouraged.

“You’ll hate me...”

“We need to know...”

“The voice told me to...to...to go to the nursery and put a pillow over Llaimos. I found myself there with a pillow in my hand...I threw it down and ran. I wanted to die...”

Sacul’s sobs increased as Kryslie held him.

“You are free of the voices now, Sacul. You broke their control.”

“What if they come back?” he sobbed.

“If they do, or if you see your friends acting strange – come and talk to me, or the Governors or even an older student,” Kryslie advised.

“Will I be punished?” Sacul asked. “I should be...”

Kryslie looked at the Governors. They waited, letting her answer.

“Governor Xyron or Governor Reslic will need to have someone talk to you about this, Sacul. They will want to try to work out how to stop this happening to any one else. You will need to be very honest and if need be they will recommend special training for you.”

“Will it hurt?”

“Did the voices say that?”

Sacul nodded.

Kryslie grinned wryly. “For you – I don’t think so. You have a very good reason to make your mind stronger. Me, however, I was a lot more stubborn. My lesson needed to be more forceful.”

“You, Princess?” Sacul’s eyes widened as he realised what she meant.

“Yes, me. Even I can make a bad judgement. The important thing is to learn from them and become stronger.”

Sacul nodded solemnly.

“Now, I suggest that you have the drink Madame Teena is preparing for you and get a good night’s sleep.”

Kryslie released Sacul when the drink arrived and walked over to the High King.

“I’m ready to return to my room now.”

Jono Reslic spoke softly in response to her comment.

“Let us talk together for a time.”

Kryslie was surprised to see her brother waiting in Reslic’s private office. She met his gaze as he leant forward to look at her and then she felt the touch of his mind. She gave him a slight smile so he knew she was fine.

Tymos relaxed back in the chair. He had feared the worst when he had been sent to wait in this room where the walls somehow blocked contact with his sister.

“It was Sacul again, Tym. He wanted to die...”

Kryslie told her brother what had occurred. She paced the room as she related all the details of what she had sensed and done.

Reslic leant back in his chair behind his desk and listened without interrupting. His attitude, whilst not casual, was not as formal as during their other visits to this office.

“An excellent summation,” Reslic commented when Kryslie had finished speaking. “So, do you understand now why the curfew is so important?” He looked at both children.

“I understand the reason,” Kryslie admitted, not giving any indication of whether she agreed with it or not.

“It didn’t help Sacul, Sir,” Tymos pointed out. “And he is normally a very earnest child.”

“He admitted sneaking out at night,” Kryslie told her brother and from Reslic’s nod, she knew he had also heard that admission. “That little demon, Titus, dared him.”

“He went no more than two steps out of the door and then only for a very short time. A step further and he would have been spoken to,” Reslic stated.

“I find it difficult to believe that such a brief time would be enough to influence him,” Kryslie told Reslic. “And there was Zacary. He was probably vulnerable because he was nursing resentments.”

Tymos thought on that. “It might be that Zacary’s teasing gave Sacul a low sense of self esteem. I know he seemed better with us, but that might have made him vulnerable.”

“Zacary tried that on us, but we ignored him,” Kryslie said.

“Perhaps you both might offer to help psychologist Rogert to treat him,” Reslic suggested. “It seems there might be merit in your opinionated, stubborn, human upbringing.”

Kryslie tried to read Reslic’s expression, but it seemed perfectly serious. She smiled faintly. If it had been Stenn, and not his father saying that, she would have known it was teasing. The President, however, had never teased them yet, but she did know he had a wickedly acute sense of humour.

She actually found pride in that description and with her own expression perfectly sober, suggested, “We could spread some of that opinionated stubbornness around.” She thought privately to Tymos, “Two can play with barbed comments.”

She continued for Reslic’s ears, “We could try to teach all the older pre-transition children.”

The lack of a barbed rejoinder proved that Reslic had been serious.

“The days before transition are particularly perilous. The power usually rises with the onset of adolescence,” Reslic told them. “When the child was born off world, the usual indications of transition are often masked. Children born here are taught to recognise the changes, but off world children find so many other differences.”

“Well, I am glad we found Sacul.” Kryslie tried to keep her voice level and not sound defiant.

“And if such a situation happens again...?” Reslic prompted.

“I’d act again,” Kryslie felt compelled to admit. She saw Reslic watching her, waiting for her to continue. “Perhaps by telling Father, or one of the guards – or by insisting on joining the search. I won’t promise not to.”

Reslic’s gaze became harder.

Kryslie tried to verbalise her thoughts. “I accept that until we are fully trained we must accept many restrictions, including curfew for our own protection – and that we are safer at night when we are with others. But, when it comes to susceptibility to alien influences, are we really so much safer by day?”

“We don’t have much free time during the day,” Tymos pointed out. “Though, Sacul had not yet graduated to the large lyceum, so he would have had more free time. Same as Zacary.”

Kryslie had a sudden thought. “There have been others, like Sacul?”

Reslic nodded.

“Were they all born elsewhere?”

“Most, not all. They were all adolescent, some pre-transition, some just past transition.”

“Sir, you may not be convinced of this,” Kryslie spoke quietly. “But I knew that the call I heard was not a ruse to get us alone so that we could be influenced.”

“I agree, that in this instance, your instincts were correct,” Reslic said guardedly.

Kryslie walked over to the clear wall panel where she could look down over the dark gardens.

“I know you are trying to teach us wisdom. So that we know what is right and true and what isn’t. So we can understand our instincts and the reasons why we are what we are,” Kryslie seemed to be speaking more to herself. “With all those meditation sessions, I have come to realise how totally ignorant we were when we first came here. I can see the changes in myself. Just as Sacul realised the changes in his mind. I knew I could help him. Even if the action was little more than instinct.”

Kryslie fell silent.

“So you guide us until we understand our instincts,” Tymos spoke into the silence. “I guess you know us better than we know ourselves. You always seem to know what we are capable of and what we are not. You must have known, when you told me to ponder the subject of time that I was impatient for the time when I would know everything. You never stop learning, do you? The more you learn, the more you realise that there is to learn. To deny that is to stifle yourself.”

“What do you think we might do to help others from being influenced?” Reslic asked, not idly. He wanted to hear what they thought.

Kryslie answered. “Can you test the children, when they are at that stage, for traces of empathy or other mind gifts? Then teach those that show signs, to shield their minds?”

“With us, the psychic link was more obvious than it might be for a single child,” Tymos added, “and perhaps, those that came from off world, haven’t had time enough for all that meditation stuff to sink in. Until you taught us to shield, we didn’t understand what that part of the meditation techniques were meant to achieve.”

Reslic thought to himself, in a shielded part of his mind, that these two children never ceased to surprise him. Not even the Elders had predicted Kryslie’s powerful mind healing gift. Now as he listened to them talking and reasoning aloud, he was struck by their intuition. Their

viewpoint was still adolescent, but their ideas to prevent further cases, like Sacul's, were worth considering.

Chapter 30 - Growing Pains

“Oh, so you do still exist,” Stenn Reslic remarked from floor level.

Tymos had just returned to the High King’s suite. He turned to see where the voice came from.

Stenn went on, “I was beginning to think my father threw you in some dungeon – because you managed to disarm him yesterday.” He grinned when he saw his friend blush.

“Only once,” Tymos said defensively, and then quickly changed the subject. “What are you doing here?”

“Can’t you tell? I am playing with your brother, since neither you, nor Kryslie have been around much. Strong little man, your brother. I’ve been teaching him to crawl.”

“He’s only two months old,” Kryslie said, hearing Stenn’s comment as she arrived. “Babies don’t crawl that young.”

“No?” Stenn queried as he swung Llaimos up so he gurgled in delight. “Then you had better take another look at this little man. He is as big as Ennis, and my youngest brother is six months older.”

Kryslie stared at Stenn, and then at Llaimos. Her little brother was big. He had indeed grown a lot in the past month while they were having extra lessons. Tanya moved into view behind Stenn and Kryslie saw a look of fear on her foster mother’s face. She leant down and took her brother, feeling the little boy recognise her.

Stenn stood up and straightened his clothes. “So what have you been doing? You haven’t been in class for a month now and I have seen you practicing with level alpha.”

“It’s this business of getting us to level delta before the tour,” Tymos explained. “Last week, Governor Xyron gave us free access to the computer archives and told us to investigate whatever appealed to us.”

“Real...ee,” Stenn drawled. “Well, I’ll be...I have never heard of students having free run in the archives, but then, you are Uncle Ty’s heirs. What have you been looking at?”

“History of battles, types of known weaponry,” Tymos shrugged. “But I usually end up on some other side track. I got into xeno-anthropology today.”

“Were you down in that basement too, Kryslie?” Stenn asked. He had to repeat his question because Kryslie was gently rocking Llaimos and murmuring to him.

“Oh, I’ve been looking at reports of ecological warfare from throughout the galaxy and how other worlds survived it.”

“You don’t think we will need that information, surely?” Stenn said, turning pale. “I know that the aliens who intruded here have been seen in many places, but it sounded like my father had things in hand.”

“I’ve noticed you at the last few weekly meetings,” Tymos remarked. “Surely you noticed all the reports of freakish weather, and violence and rioting all over the continent?”

“Yes, but they sent out companies from the Peace Corps to deal with it,” Stenn said impatiently. “That’s their job.”

Tymos took a flask of drink from Morov and began to drink it before answering. “In the past month, we have had coastal flooding in Kilevin, a mud slide near Tureng, a strong ground tremor near Basiq, ...” Tymos itemised over a dozen natural seeming disasters, where the Peace Corps were deployed to bring emergency supplies and provide aid.

Kryslie, holding a sleeping Llaimos, said, “They are going in smaller numbers to more and more places.”

Stenn stared at her, realising she was right.

“So, what would happen if those aliens and their troops were to attack?” Kryslie asked.

“They would recall the space fleet,” Stenn said at once.

Kryslie nodded, she and Tymos knew of the space fleet, and it eased one of her worries but her stomach did not seem to relax.

“What’s up?” Stenn asked, seeing her go still.

“Never mind. Just some mild discomfort,” Kryslie told him. “Tymos and I are getting used to it, and can ease the worst of it.”

“What are you talking about?” Stenn demanded. His friend’s faces were sheet white. Then he felt the slightest of tremors and the lighter ornaments on a display shelf rattled. “You felt that coming...”

“Yup,” Tymos admitted. “None of Governor Xyron’s experts know what is causing the tremors and no evidence has been found of unnatural causes of the weather either, even with the local civilian militia helping the scientists – but my bet is on those aliens.”

“I’d ask how they could be causing the problems,” Stenn began. “But you really believe it ...why?”

“How much ancient history do you know?” Tymos asked.

“Enough, I think.”

“How about...the first mutations?” Kryslie added, after the tremors had stopped and her stomach had relaxed.

Stenn walked to a chair and slumped into it. “Why don’t you just come out and explain?” Stenn asked.

Tanya came and took Llaimos. Kryslie saw the subtle signs of tension around her stepmother’s eyes, but did not comment. She went on with her explanation. “One of those intruders decided to talk. He told Father that his people had a right to come here, to Tymorea, because they had originally come from here. Those ancestors went and colonised a planet. They called it Aerdna which means Sanctuary.”

“That? I heard my brothers talking about it,” Stenn said. “Those intruders are mad. Even if it is true, they can’t expect the whole population of a world to be able to come here. The first talk of that was over twenty years ago.”

Kryslie saw Delia hovering and recalled she should clean up before eating. She gave Stenn a look of apology and retreated to the bathing room.

Tymos took over the explanation. “It is certain that the intruders were Aeronites, and I am certain that others of that race are behind these ecological problems.”

“But why would they want to ruin the ecology if they want to come here?” Stenn asked.

“Terrorism or making threats to force us,” Tymos suggested. “Possibly so they can change our ecology for some reason. Something like that. I’ve read a bit about that world. The ones who went off from here, colonised a barren planet, after using some means to make it fertile. From what our missionaries report – the planet is reverting to its original state. That and the planet’s orbit is becoming erratic.”

“They could have asked for help,” Stenn stated. “They would have got it.”

“I suspect they are intending to take, and it is not the answer,” Tymos said. “And so far we can’t find where these intruders and scouts are hiding their ground base. Except for traces, left behind.”

“If I recall,” Stenn murmured, “Aerdna has three colonies, surely the people could move to those.”

“Probably only the rich and powerful,” Tymos said. “That’s what Kryslie thinks. So she is looking for ways to save the population from their own mistakes.”

“I hope she succeeds,” Stenn murmured fervently.

“Xyron has set others working on the idea,” Tymos told him and then changed the subject. “Are you going to eat here?”

“No, I have to get back,” Stenn admitted. “I will let the rest of our level know that you are still alive. I hope you will make time to say goodbye before you go on this tour.”

Tymos gave a weak chuckle. “Depends if we can pass our tests.”

“If you can toss a sword out of my father’s hand and beat the level alpha students, I’d say Father is trying to get you past level alpha before next week.”

“That’s absurd,” Tymos did laugh.

Stenn shrugged. “Seems like it to me and I don’t have a hope to catch up to you. Best I can do is fill your place keeping Jonko in practice.” He pushed himself up and said, “I’d best be going.”

Kryslie re-emerged from the bathing room, and Morov moved in on Tymos.

Delia asked, “Where do you intend to eat, Princess Kryslie?”

“Maybe, we should put in an appearance in the Great Hall,” Kryslie suggested.

“As you wish,” Delia agreed.

Trying to be inconspicuous, Tymos and Kryslie moved through the seated and standing people in the great hall until they found where their friends were sitting. There were a couple of extras there. Jonko seemed to be listening intently to Tobias, who was now apprenticed to the senior horticulturalist, and Keleb was talking to Sacul. Tymos slipped in next to Stenn and Kryslie went to sit next to Sacul.

“How’s life in the large lyceum,” Kryslie asked the younger boy.

Sacul glowed with pleasure. “It’s a lot more interesting. I am in level theta, and doing very well.”

He went on to tell Kryslie what he had been learning, and finally got around to thanking her for her help. He was a little reticent about talking of the night he had been in the snow, and the extra lessons he had needed, but his gratitude was genuine.

Tymos was curious to know how long Jonko had known Tobias, and finally decided to ask his friends.

“Not long after you started your private lessons again,” Denlic supplied the answer. “He offered to tutor him in self defence and basic weapons. Tobias is going to go out with the scientists if he does well at his next evaluation.”

“I thought you had to reach level delta before leaving the estate,” Tymos murmured. “Or have I missed something?”

“That’s the rule for students,” Stenn told him. “Otherwise, you just have to prove you have your power under control. It’s not so hard if you only have a little.”

Tymos frowned, and Stenn hurriedly added, “I don’t mean that in a nasty way. Tobias is okay, even if he only ever talks about plants.”

Further talk was paused as Morov brought meal trays for Tymos and Kryslie. The others decided they should go and get their own.

Tymos and Kryslie were deep in concentration when they both felt the impact of Llaimos’s distress. Without even a glance or thought, they both transmitted from the computer archive in the basement to the High King’s suite.

Their brother was screaming, and Tanya, with tears leaking down her face, was watching helplessly as the nurse tried to calm him.

Like two parts of one whole, Tymos went and took Llaimos and Kryslie went to Tanya and embraced her. Tanya’s silent crying became jerking sobs, but Llaimos’s cries abated.

“Hush, Tanya,” Kryslie whispered. “Llaimos will stay upset while you are. Tell me what is wrong. I have never seen you like this.”

And indeed, she hadn’t. The serenity of the royal consorts was legendary.

Tanya did not attempt to talk, so Kryslie allowed herself to sense her foster mother’s emotions.

Fear, revulsion, shame, helplessness, anxiety.

“You are really muddled up,” Kryslie murmured. “Do you want me to bring Father here?”

“No. No, don’t,” she pleaded. “I’ll...I’ll pull myself together.”

Kryslie took a guess. “It’s Llaimos, isn’t it? He’s growing so fast, like Stenn said.”

Tanya nodded. “I don’t know how to handle this.”

“Is he healthy, other than that?” Kryslie asked.

“Yes, but they don’t know why he is growing so fast.”

Fleeting thoughts past through Kryslie’s mind, but all she remembered was, “...he’s the third.”

She spoke it aloud, and it felt like a prophecy.

“If he is healthy, I’d accept the strangeness,” Kryslie advised, but she felt Tanya reject the suggestion.

“What if he grows so fast, he’ll age and die within a few years?” Tanya voiced her concern.

“Ah,” Kryslie said in understanding. “I don’t think you need to fear that. If he is growing fast, I think that the Guardians of Peace have a reason to meddle. Just like they did with us – having us born elsewhere.”

“But the two of you are special,” Tanya whispered.

“So is Llaimos, and the Guardians chose you to be his mother. It is an honour,” Kryslie told her.

It still didn’t help. The maternal concern was overpowering, as was her helplessness. Yet she was calming down, since Tymos was succeeding in reducing the screams to mere crying. He brought Llaimos over, and remarked with calm acceptance, “I don’t know much about babies, Tanya, but I would say Llaimos is trying to cut teeth.”

The nurse, standing back and watching Tymos and Kryslie create order, spoke up in relief, “I will get some salve from the medics and something for him to bite on.”

“Good,” Tymos remarked. “That will give my finger some respite, though I do have a few more if necessary.”

The nurse went out of the suite, as Kryslie asked, “Is that all that was wrong?”

In her mind, she heard, “No,” but Tymos said aloud to Tanya, “When the nurse gets back, why don’t you have her fix a bath for him. Krys and I will wash him – I think it will help him relax.”

Having the problem put in an understandable way, Tanya began to calm. She knew what to do.

At that moment, Tymoros strode in and looked around. His face was creased in worry, as if he came expecting a dreadful situation. He made no comment about being dragged away from a highly important meeting, merely asked, “Are things under control?”

“Yes,” Kryslie answered before Tanya could. “I am afraid our brother has sensed our situation of being pushed to get to level delta and he thinks he has to grow fast to catch us.”

It sounded like a light attempt at humour, but Tymoros saw the traces of tears on Tanya’s face before she turned to go to the bathing room. He went to her, knowing that Tymos and Kryslie could handle their brother.

“What is it?” Kryslie thought at her brother, as she took Llaimos from him.

In the same manner, Tymos replied, “Not only teething, but having growing pains as well, poor baby.”

They both sensed the outrage at being called ‘baby’.

“I see,” Kryslie said aloud. She cuddled Llaimos and patted his back. “Little brother, I know being an infant is frustrating, but your nurse has gone to get something to sooth your mouth, and then you will be able to eat. Then you won’t feel like a starving cat creature. Perhaps you should stop trying to catch up to us and give yourself a rest.”

The cries increased again, and Kryslie sensed the frustration. “Hush, Llaimos, you are upsetting your mother,” she chided gently. This time, she had the sense of being rejected.

In her mind, she thought, “Gods, Tym, his mind is even more mature than his body. He doesn’t understand why Tanya is distressed. He thinks it is his fault.”

The nurse returned with a tube of cream, and Kryslie put her little finger out for the nurse to put a dab some on.

To Llaimos she said, "This will numb your gums, and then perhaps you will listen to me."

The crying reduced to whimpers. Tanya, still being held by Tymoros, directed the nurse to get a bath ready.

"Perhaps you can give me an explanation for the urgent summons," Tymoros asked quietly.

Tymos stayed near Kryslie and Llaimos. "Our brother is growing rapidly. It is painful and frustrating for him and stressful for Tanya."

Kryslie added, "He feels, he senses...emotions mostly and he has no way to communicate what he wants to know. He understands us, and we can understand him. At the moment, apart from cutting teeth and all, he cannot understand why his mother is so upset."

Tanya hid her face on Tymoros's chest.

"You haven't failed him, Tanya," Kryslie said at once. "We all have. I didn't notice how fast he was growing until Stenn compared him to Ennis."

"That young man of Jono's is very astute," Tymoros remarked. "I did know that Llaimos was advanced for his age, but I was assured he was healthy."

Kryslie blurted, "He needs more than we are giving him. May I suggest an idea?"

"I would be interested to hear it," Tymoros invited.

"His mind is more advanced than his body, and although Tanya talks to him and tells him things, she can't keep it up for every hour of the day. Could you talk to the people who teach the youngest children and have them make recordings with voice and pictures – to teach him words, ideas, concepts and suited for children of two to seven. Then have it played in his vicinity all the time. Even some of the nursery stories like Stenn used for the figure box would be good."

"He might absorb the information like we did when we were in the small lyceum," Tymos explained. "And I would like to add another suggestion. Have one of the medics that specialise in massage and tactile therapies – try them on Llaimos. The massage will help with his growing pains and they might also help prepare him to master gross motor skills."

Tanya straightened from her husband's embrace. "I feel so helpless..."

"I know that feeling," Kryslie sighed. "It is like when you want to go out and fix all the world's problems and get told by short tempered instructors that we can't do everything and we should concentrate on learning and leave the doing to those already trained and experienced."

"But what else can I do?" Tanya pleaded.

"Simple," Tymos said with a smile. "You can give Llaimos your unconditional devotion. He needs it."

"But you two always know how to calm him," Tanya protested.

"It takes two to know one," Kryslie smiled down at Llaimos. "He is racing to grow up and we are being shoved at high speed to learn things and master skills and use our thought processes more efficiently."

"Because he is the third," Tanya repeated what Kryslie had said earlier.

Kryslie glanced up in time to see Tymoros nod slightly, as if he now understood something. She went on to say, "Llaimos needs you because we can't be around except to dance attendance on him at night." She decided to suggest, "Father, why don't you take Tanya somewhere for a quiet, relaxing cup of herbal tea and leave Llaimos to us. He is due for a feed and change, and his bath is ready."

Tymoros nodded, but said, "When you are done, I will have a word with both of you."

He saw two nods of agreement, and turned, urging Tanya to come with him.

Tanya, when she returned, had regained her normal serenity. She went to Tymos and Kryslie and gave each of them a hug of thanks, and then went to look in on the sated and sleeping Llaimos.

Tymoros gestured for his children to follow him to his sanctum.

Kryslie chose to sit cross-legged on the floor in front of her father's favourite seat. Tymos crouched beside his sister.

"What do you know about us, that you haven't told us?" Kryslie demanded.

Tymoros didn't answer the question. "What have you noticed that makes you ask?"

"The look on your face when Tanya blurted out what I said earlier – about Llaimos being the third."

"Don't you know what you meant?" was the reply.

"No, it was like I knew something, but had forgotten all but that. It meant something to you, didn't it?"

"Both of you are developing fast, too," Tymoros admitted.

It wasn't the answer that Kryslie was expecting. She recalled a comment that Stenn had made to Tymos that he had later told her. "It certainly doesn't feel like it. Everyone is pushing us. As if we haven't a hope in hell of reaching level delta in time to go with you next week. But Stenn thinks we are so far ahead of him that he will never catch up. He says we are better at physical skills than the level alpha students."

"Your young friend has again proved his acuity. But you need to understand that your power is very strong, much stronger than other children of your age and rank."

"We haven't met Stenn's oldest brothers or Denlic's," Tymos remarked. "But I thought that because we were your heirs, that our degree of power wasn't unusual."

"But that's not it," Kryslie said, considering what she saw in her foster father's face. "We are a lot stronger, aren't we?"

"Yes, you are and perhaps I need to explain that the business of reaching level delta is not just reaching an arbitrary level of education. It is reaching the point where you have your power fully under your conscious control. What do you think that means in terms of your strength of power?"

Tymoros was pleased that they thought about the answer before replying.

Tymos remarked, "It means we have to be tested at a higher and harder standard."

"Yes, that is exactly right."

"But if we are tested against the level alpha students, wouldn't that mean we would be past that level?" Kryslie asked.

"Perhaps you will understand when I point out that the levels above level delta are aimed at taking our students as far as we can to show them the peak of their potential, and to broaden their knowledge and skills further. As for both of you, we are not even close to seeing your full potential."

Neither Tymos nor Kryslie knew what to say.

"Although it seems that you are beyond level alpha in skills, we are finding you are capable of learning at a tremendous rate – as fast as we can challenge you. Yes, we are pushing you harder and faster – but you are able to sustain whatever we have demanded of you. We have not yet found your limit."

"I can't really comprehend what you are saying," Kryslie admitted.

Tymos blurted, "What do you and everyone expect of us? If we know so much now, surely we could be going out and helping with the problems or finding those who are causing them."

"Powerful you may be," Tymoros changed his tone to his 'official' voice, that they knew meant they had to heed his words. "But you are yet neither at level delta, nor officially adult. Your duty now, is to learn and practice your skills, and prove you have mastered your power. Until then, all other occupations are moot."

"And then?" Kryslie challenged.

"And then, you will still only be two people without the hands on experience to solve the problems. It is more efficient to let the people already trained to handle problems do their work."

"What if there is a situation that no one can handle?" Tymos added his challenge.

“If you must act, you will know. Until then, keep your minds open and don’t confine yourself to a restricted range of options. It might well be, that the Guardians will speak to you,” Tymoros advised them. “Do not be in a rush to act.”

“So, we have to stay safe?” Tymos mused aloud. “Like some kind of reserve weapon.”

“And you have been playing down our ability?” Kryslie asked.

“That is how it will be for a time,” Tymoros told her.

“I guess I see the sense in that,” Kryslie admitted, relieving her father of one anxiety. “Those aliens, if they try for us again, will think we are still children and underestimate us.”

“We do not intend for them to get close enough to you to take you. However, be warned – I do not underestimate you. If you have the sense of needing to do something – come to me first.”

Tymos and Kryslie exchanged glances. Tymos spoke for both of them. “We will – if we can.”

Tymoros merely nodded, and said, “You can expect the formal testing for level delta to begin tomorrow. I suggest you make the most of your time this afternoon.”

Chapter 31 - Testing

Xyron's examination took the form of testing their recall of things that one or other of them had learnt, read or scanned, and if those things had been in the archives, recalling and re-finding the exact references.

"Even with a perfect memory, it can be hard to keep so much information in your mind. Moreover, since not everyone has a perfectly retentive memory, we have the computer archives. You can find any information you need, once you have the skills. I am satisfied that you can do that," Xyron told them.

Therefore, within a day, that aspect of testing for level delta was over.

As Tymos went with Kryslie back to the High King's palace, he said, "That was the easy part. Reslic has been testing our weapons skill for the past two weeks, but I am sure he will want to test our psychic skills and mental discipline."

"I have no doubt that he will have thought of a way to do it," Kryslie told him. "I predict it will be while he ensures that we cannot reinforce each other."

"If that is what he intends, Kryslie, we should abide by it. We have to be sure we can each function alone. It can be our secret that we are stronger together."

"I won't resist it," Kryslie assured him. "I have learnt that lesson, and the Governors all know we are better when working together. As I see it, the only way they can fully test us, as individuals, is with one of us unconscious. Even tightly shielded, I am still aware of you."

At breakfast the next day, Tymoros told them to expect a summons later, but at first they should return to their study of the archives.

Delia came with a summons for Kryslie to go to the armoury, and she went off. Morov brought Tymos a drink and retreated.

Kryslie realised that she had spoken truly the previous day. As soon as she sensed Tymos's mind become a blank place in hers, she had warning of a surprise test.

Five black clad ambushers materialised around her within seconds of her arrival in the armoury. One glance at them and she knew the rules. She had anticipated something like this when she had dressed as she did for physical skills lessons. Her outfit was a crimson version of the all-in-one black suits of her opponents, but without the head covering. Since her opponents were deliberately anonymous, she did not greet any of them.

Last time she had faced five to one odds, Perrin Reslic had told her that real assassins would not play fair. These opponents were only waiting for a signal to start and they would be looking for a means to disable her. They would be in earnest, and give her no concessions and because she was so powerful now, they would not be withholding their strength.

The idea of the anonymous black outfits was to prevent her from identifying individuals, but it didn't work. From the way each of them moved and reacted, she quickly identified four of the five attackers. She studied the fifth as the group merely circled her. She had no idea who it was – not any of her instructors in weapons and physical skills – and that one was not attempting any attacks yet.

Kryslie sensed each attack and spun to parry it, judging each attack and defending perfectly. The fifth person was equally as good as the rest, but he feinted attacks, and she believed he was the one using mental attacks against her. It wasn't the President, for she could see Jono Reslic watching this encounter.

The mental attacks were a mixture of insults and deliberate attempts to distract her. The mental voice had already informed her that the odd framework of metal and wood on one side of the armoury was strong enough to contain her and she would end up restrained by it. Then it had elaborated on the types of tortures it could be used for. She doubted that these attackers

would deliberately torture her, but as a lesson, she might find herself enduring an unpleasant session.

In any case, if they managed to restrain her, in her mind she would lose the challenge. She had no intention of losing.

She held her own during the first half hour of furious skirmishing, blocking most attacks and getting some well-aimed ones of her own to their designated targets. Then she began to feel the sense of pressure building in her stomach again – the feeling that presaged a ground tremor. A strong one, she knew.

For a few moments, she lost concentration. Her awareness of the people around her was lost in the need to control the painful pressure in her gut. Her opponents took the opportunity, and caught her in a painful grip. Two of them dragged her towards the metal and wood framework, even though she tried her best to resist. Until the tremor finally began, she felt weak and unable to wrest herself free. Her only advantage was in knowing a tremor was imminent and she would be ready when it did, for her strength would return then.

In the first few seconds of sensory confusion, she overcame the two dragging her and sprang back at the other three. In moments, she had sorted out which of the five she had disabled.

“A lucky break,” one of the three commented, his voice coming from a synthesiser to disguise it. The voice went on to disparage her fighting skill, and general needle her in an attempt to get her angry.

From the rhythm and cadence of the voice, and some of the comments, Kryslie recognised Perrin Reslic. He knew her well enough to know exactly what had angered her in the past. It amused her now, rather than angered her. Harder to ignore was the insidious mental voice that was urging her to ‘show him’.

Kryslie ignored both types of voice. The only return comment she made was, “You don’t want to see me angry, Perrin Reslic, or I will stop merely playing with you.”

That he had not expected her to recognise his synthesised voice was apparent to her extra sense as was the faint thread of amusement underlying the needling mental voice from the opponent she hadn’t recognised.

So far, this encounter was without weapons; Kryslie wondered at the significance of that. Was it because this was her area of expertise, and it might make her overconfident?

The three remaining opponents were attacking her every time they thought she was not expecting, or couldn’t see them. However, she continued to sense the movements and spun to counter their attack.

When did they intend this to end? When was she worn out and tied up? When she had bettered these three? The first two were standing back out of the way.

It was time for her to take the offensive. She drew in more energy every time she touched one of the three. She analysed the moves of each one and from merely defending, she leapt, attacked and landed behind the other two – forcing them to spin around and forget about the third now lying stunned on the floor. Her mind flicked to her victim. He was stirring and mentally cursing. She sent to his mind, “You knew what to expect, Gann Reslic.”

“You won’t find me so easy,” Perrin Reslic taunted her.

The other opponent stayed silent but the mental needling had not ceased. He was the only one she hadn’t yet closed with. He would be her next target.

Her inner thoughts mused that both these taller opponents had learnt the same skills that she had been taught. To beat them, she needed to improvise.

She began a pattern of movements, and watched as her opponents studied it. When she knew the silent one was about to attack, she went from moving to perfect stillness in a microsecond. As the opponent went past, she grabbed, twisted and threw – or rather, intended to throw. In that instant of touch, she recognised her opponent and that did rock her.

She had never seen her father fight, or even train, but it made sense that he did. In the last instant before Tymoros hit the floor, she controlled the power in the throw. He touched the floor gently, not solidly, and Perrin Reslic grabbed her.

“Consider yourself dead, Princess Kryslie,” Perrin Reslic claimed. “You took pity on an opponent.”

“I am sure there is a penalty for regicide too,” she muttered, shaking herself free.

The man on the floor stood up and removed his hood. Tymoros smiled at Kryslie.

“Impressive,” he commended. “I am pleased that you spared me a hard landing and you used your foreknowledge of the tremors to excellent advantage. Something affected you though, what was it?”

“Tymos and I feel the pressure building up – like a stomach ache. I knew the tremor would be a strong one from the degree of pain.”

“Then that is something you need more work on,” Jono Reslic told her, as he offered her a cup of the restorative drink she was used to.

Kryslie drank the drink gratefully and dared to ask, “How did I do?”

“Well enough,” Reslic admitted. “This test will be considered and we will talk to you when all tests are complete. Have a rest and go back to your study in the archives.”

Resting would be good, Kryslie decided.

“Tomorrow we will test you with various weapons.” Reslic told her, seeming to watch her intently.

Kryslie barely had time for the scrutiny to register. Between one breath and the next, she went from awake to asleep, unaware that the drink had been drugged.

Reslic summoned Delia and had Gann help her to take Kryslie to her room in Tymoros’s suite.

Tymos roused, slumped over his desk in the computer archives. The screen in front of him had gone into hibernation mode. He straightened and looked around, realising that he must have slept for several hours. Even the room was dark. He realised then that he couldn’t sense his sister. As he stood and began to move around, he adjusted his eyes to see in the dark. He tried to call Kryslie’s mind, but he felt no reply. She was alive though, he was sure of it.

As he tried to recall what he was doing before he fell asleep, he felt a breath of air moving. The only warning of danger was the arm that came around and tried to catch him by the throat. It was just a dark shape outlined by a heat aura. He acted immediately, Perrin Reslic had caught him this way before but now he knew how to counter it. He did, and his would be assailant landed against another of the tables and chairs. As he tried to leave the room, he felt something fall on him. Some kind of net contracted around him. Struggling only made the net contract further, and he tried to draw in power to break free. He couldn’t. He tried to visualise the net strands becoming looser and thought he was succeeding when he heard a mental voice saying, “You are mine now. I have your sister too.”

He shivered, recalling that time in the caverns and the mental voice that had frightened him with its sense of gloating possession. This mental voice was different, but saying the same sort of things.

The voice went on, “Don’t expect help this time.”

Something hit his head, hard, and he felt disoriented for a moment. He concentrated on easing the pain, and realised that he was no longer in the archive room, but back in the caverns, in the dark, moist cave. He must have blacked out, but he didn’t think so.

Silence was around him, with no sense of any other person. All he heard was his own gasping breath and the steady drip-drip of water nearby.

He was tightly constricted, and he needed to get free. He had to find where Kryslie was. For half an hour, Tymos wriggled so that one or other of his hands felt over the strands of the net, until he felt a more solid place – the node where the strands originated. The memory of a brief

glance of an archived computer record surfaced. This was a strangler's net, and to free himself, he needed to press the outer surface of the node. He couldn't position his hand or fingers close enough. In an instant of thought, he rolled so that his weight was on that section of net. He imagined his body getting denser, heavier – as he had to do to swim under the surface of the pseudo-aqua in the natatorium pool. The net retracted with a sharp whoosh.

Tymos sprang up and made for the area of deeper shadow that meant a tunnel. He ran along it and into a wall. He paused to rub his nose and tried to see better. He reached out and felt the rock wall. It was cool and didn't emit a heat aura for him to see. He could just make out the walls if he moved slowly.

He heard a sound, like footsteps suddenly stopping a moment after he did. He moved ahead slowly, keeping one hand on the wall as an extra guide. After his hand had been touching the wall for a time, he realised the rock was glowing very faintly. It gave him enough illumination to move a little faster. The wall seemed to be alive with energy, waiting for him to grasp and use. It exhilarated him and his mind moved at greater speed.

"I can use my transmitter," he thought, reaching for it and bringing it into his hand. He programmed it for the beam in point in the High King's palace. When he activated it, he felt himself seem to hit solid rock.

"That didn't work," he muttered to himself, and assumed he was outside the power nexus that enabled the transmitters to work.

Another idea occurred to him, as he recalled mention of an anti-transmission field. He manually programmed his transmitter to move him in a short flit of four feet, just before he activated it, he changed it to eight feet. This time, it worked and he found himself further along the passage, away from the glowing area.

At that moment, he sensed a start of surprise – several – and knew he was not alone in the dark. He glanced behind him and saw black figures silhouetted against the faint glow he had left behind. When they began to trot towards him, Tymos began to run. He wondered if they had just arrived, or been there for a while. He hadn't sensed them before that...or had he? Was that why he changed the distance he set on the transmitter

The tunnel opened into a cavern – the sense of the walls was further away and they no longer glowed. Seeing was harder; he needed to listen for sounds and feel the air movements. He wondered if the figures following him were as blind as he was, or were they merely playing with him?

Needing to augment his hearing, he instinctively drew on the energy he felt all around him. He began to hear the padding of almost silent feet and the even breathing of the ones stalking him. He felt the movement of air as two of the stalkers ran at him. He twisted, attacked and blocked. In moments, both were down and lightly stunned. One smelt vaguely of cedar. He checked that each was breathing and one of them stirred. Tymos moved off and considered a wisp of thought. The smell of cedar was familiar – where had he smelt it? Finally, some kind of fog cleared from his mind. Konn Reslic had smelt of cedar that first day in the large lyceum.

Tymos knew what was happening now, this was a test, and they had tried to muddle his mind to handicap him. He tried to reach Krys again, still without a reaction from her. Not surprising, they had probably made her sleep so as not to help him. Then he recalled his own unplanned nap. They had done that to him first – slipped a drug into the drink Morov had brought him.

Knowing this was a test was not enough. He had to finish it – get himself out of the trap he was in. His transmitter didn't work, but he would wager that his stalkers had transmitted into the caverns. He turned and edged back to where he had left his two victims. Recognising the need to see, the rock under the two unconscious assailants began to glow. Tymos removed the head coverings and identified Konn Reslic and Jarro Reslic. Neither had transmitters.

He had forgotten the mental voice and now he heard it again. It was amused at his attempts to escape, disparaged his futile efforts, and stressed his helplessness and how he would become simply a mouldering pile of bones because the rest of the attackers would get him in time.

Tymos ignored the voice – the words were reminiscent of the one he'd heard the first time he had come down here, but they did not feel as threatening. However, another mental presence was beginning to intrude on his concentration. This one was harder to ignore. It was Llaimos, and his distress was growing in intensity. Tymos had to stop, and project calm. He drew close to the wall, stood very still, felt the aura around him. He listened, and heard the furtive movements of more assailants. Two, he thought. Another wisp of thought, "He cannot transmit out. This cavern is shielded."

A faint breeze went past him.

"Ah," Tymos thought. "If the shield was not there, perhaps I could have transmitted out."

He put the thought aside to concentrate on the mental distress coming from his brother. It was strong, even though he was only two months old.

"Llaimos, little brother, I am okay, really," he sent mentally. He felt the naive mind recognise his. "You are safe. Mother is with you, isn't she?"

The game of hide and seek took on a new intensity. A beam weapon erupted from a few feet away and struck the wall, barely an arms length away. Tymos kept still, with the aura hiding him. The hunters were trying to force him to move. He had to return part of his mind to Llaimos and interpret the emotion coming from him.

"Kryslie is asleep," Tymos sent, more as an image, but the mental wailing increased. "Brother, this is a game – a rough one – but father and others are testing me. They don't want Krys helping me."

Another bolt of energy narrowly missed him. The other mental voice began again. It had picked up on his reaction to Llaimos.

"The brat had better get used to it. You won't be getting out of here. In a century, perhaps, someone will stumble on your bones."

To himself, Tymos thought, "I have had enough of this."

Instead of trying to find the exit, he decided he needed to see if the remaining hunters had a transmitter. He brought to mind what he had learnt about transmitters on the first day he had free run of the archives. His transmitter might be partly disabled, and there might not be a shield – that might be a trick.

It was a plan, and he deliberately ignored the inadvisability of using another person's transmitter. Xyron had said his was calibrated to him - probably because he was a student and restricted to short range. He couldn't move someone with him, but servants could and the servants had less power than he did.

Tymos squatted low; the energy beams were aimed at chest height. He used his left hand to feel around on the dirt and rock of the floor until he found a flake of stone. He tossed it a few feet away, ahead of the hunters. The clatter sounded like a gunshot, but instead of ricochet echoes, he heard padding feet and elevated breathing. He was ready when the stalkers went past to launch himself at the second one. A brief tussle, Tymos snatched the transmitter. He rolled clear and activated it. He did not try to change the setting since every microsecond mattered. He felt the brush of a grab as he dematerialised.

He found himself on the floor of Reslic's office, with both Reslic and his father staring down at him.

Reslic spoke to his attendant. "Tell Gann to deactivate the force shield on the cavern complex and help my brother back up. He will need to see the medics."

Tymos stared up at Reslic and chose to say nothing – forcing Reslic to speak first.

"Perrin received backflow from your departure, Prince Tymos."

“He is an experienced member of your staff. He should have aborted his grab when he felt the repeller field.” Tymos kept his voice even and stared back at the President. When he felt he had made his point, he pushed himself up.

“If this test is over, I have somewhere else I need to be,” Tymos told them. He turned to his father. “How can you sit there? Surely you can hear Llaimos screaming mentally - since you were using that fact to try to distract me.”

Tymoros did not betray his inner thoughts. “Tanya has Seoni and Dari with her. They have both told her that Llaimos needs to learn that he cannot keep on demanding that you and Kryslie run to him when he cries.”

“He is only two months old,” Tymos almost hissed, but he controlled his anger.

“And as you pointed out, his mind is more mature than his body. It is not too soon for him to learn that he doesn’t need you or someone for everything – all the time.” Tymoros spoke deliberately and firmly.

“You don’t understand...” Tymos began to insist.

“Seoni and Dari have a great deal more experience with babies than you do, Prince Tymos,” Reslic told him severely.

“Llaimos is not an ordinary child. He is growing fast and it is painful.” Tymos omitted polite etiquette.

“Then you should teach him to manage it,” Reslic told him, perfectly serious.

Tymos bit back a retort, and began to turn to leave.

Tymoros halted him with the question, “How did you know it was me in your mind?”

“The tone wasn’t arrogant enough or derisive, denigrating,” Tymos didn’t turn back, but answered dismissively. “I would have said you were not a good enough actor to play a villain, but I have changed my mind. And Llaimos isn’t a brat – I should know.”

Without the expected politeness, Tymos strode from the room, intending to ignore any attempt to continue the conversation. He tried to transmit away, and again the process failed. He went in search of a servant to take him to Llaimos.

With equal brusqueness, he strode into and through the High King’s suite, past Tanya and the other consorts and into the room where Llaimos’s screaming was unabated. He shut the door behind him and spoke to the screaming infant.

“For the Guardian’s sake, Llaimos, I told you they were testing me. It was a game. And Krys is fine – if you would deign to stop your noise, I will take you in to wake her up.”

Tymos had to shout to be heard, and he knew he was angry, but it was anger at his elders not his brother.

The screams subsided to uncontrolled gulping sobs. Now Tymos went and picked his brother up, held him to his shoulder and massaged his back and sent a feeling of calm.

“Come on,” Tymos said to the distressed child. “I think both you and I have had enough of being tested. Let’s go wake Krys.”

Tymos carried his brother past the three consorts and Llaimos’s nurse, without acknowledging them. He went into his sister’s room without knocking. She was still fast asleep.

“No wonder you thought she was dead – if she slept through your noise storm,” Tymos remarked. He freed one hand to shake his twin gently. It took half a minute before she stirred. Her first reaction was to grip his hand.

“Gods,” she swore. “I feel like newly laid floor tiles. What ever they gave me was powerful.”

“It feels like it either quelled your power, or you needed a lot of power to neutralise it,” Tymos told her. “If you need it – I have plenty of angry energy to share with you.”

“You and Llaimos both,” Kryslie agreed. “Give him to me and while you do something about getting calm or I will be throwing a tantrum next. Want to tell me what stunts they pulled on you and why Llaimos is so upset?”

“Later,” Tymos promised. He understood that Kryslie meant that Llaimos was receiving his anger. “Reslic said we should teach him pain control techniques. Isn’t he a bit young?”

“It’s a good idea, and we are probably the only ones that can do it,” Kryslie told him. “What is annoying you still?”

Tymos told her what Tymoros had said about teaching Llaimos not to keep demanding attention.

“Controlled crying,” Kryslie told him. “The psychology is sound even if it is traumatic for mother and child and us.”

Kryslie felt her twin about to erupt and quickly added, “I also agree with you. Yes, Llaimos wants us, but not for mere amusement, or out of impatience or what ever the usual reasons are that babies demand attention.”

The gulping sobs were abating. Kryslie turned her full attention to Llaimos. “I’m fine, like Tymos told you. You were fussing over nothing. You have to trust others, like mother and father. We can’t be here all the time. We have lessons and duties, and things expected of us. We have lots to learn still and we need to try to teach you things. Did you have voices and pictures around you today?”

Kryslie sensed Llaimos remembering such things, but there was no indication of comprehension yet. “That is so you can learn things too, and it will change, day by day, so you will keep seeing and hearing new things.”

Tymos wasn’t sure that his little brother would understand, but he had to try. He touched his brother’s cheek and said, “Little brother, you can’t keep relying on us. We will do what we can to help you to help yourself, but in a few days, we will have to go away with father on his royal tour. This is important – for us – and we will be away almost two months.”

There was now quiet in the previously roiling mind of the child. Somehow, Tymos knew he understood, at least partly. Llaimos’s sobs decreased to nothing, and his siblings sensed him projecting images of pictures and voices. He was associating the recordings with ‘learn’ but he could not yet communicate the nuances.

Tymos was not sure if he meant, “I want to come and learn with you” or “tell me what you learn when away” or “You said you had something to teach me.”

“What say we give you a bath, a massage and a light feed and see how we go,” Kryslie proposed. A sense of remembered pleasure was projected to them.

Tymoros had returned when they emerged from the bathing room with Llaimos. Both Tymos and Kryslie glanced his way, but continued back to Kryslie’s sleeping room. Tanya had gone off with the other consorts.

An hour later, when they emerged again, Tymoros spoke quietly. “I will hold Llaimos for a while. I have sent your attendants to bring a meal to your apartments. You will sleep there tonight.”

Tymos kept his, “Suits me,” comment strictly to himself and forced out, “I will probably feel less like a rock rat when I have eaten.”

“What if Llaimos won’t settle?” Kryslie asked, keeping her query perfectly polite.

“I am not completely inexperienced with babies,” Tymoros remarked quietly. “And I think it must be my turn for a disturbed night’s sleep.”

“Yes,” Kryslie agreed mildly, as she settled Llaimos on his lap.

“While we are away, Tanya and Llaimos will sleep in the nursery with the other youngsters,” Tymoros told his elder children, aware that they were hiding their anger from him. “They will move in from tomorrow night. If Llaimos needs anything, Tanya will have plenty of help.”

“But you will keep having the stories and pictures going,” Tymos insisted.

“And the massaging,” Kryslie added.

“I will arrange that. It has proved helpful for much of today,” Tymoros promised. Then he looked at the composed expressions on the faces of Tymos and Kryslie, and the glittering eyes and asked, “Perhaps you will tell me whether Llaimos picked up on your testing today?”

Tymos allowed some of his disgruntlement to show, “Too damn right, father.”

Tymoros spoke in mild rebuke, “Then you both have need to practice shielding him out – like we have tried to get you to do with each other.”

Kryslie’s instant thought was that she didn’t want to, but she knew better than to say it.

“Think on it,” Tymoros directed, as if sensing the thought, and maybe he had.

Delia and Morov arrived then to fetch them. To delay a little in what he perceived as being ‘sent to their rooms’, Tymos leant over and touched Llaimos’s hand. His finger was grabbed.

“Give father a good time tonight, little brother.”

As they moved away to transmit to their individual apartments, Tymos felt Kryslie react to his unspoken idea – that their father deserved a disturbed night – for being part of causing Llaimos distress that day.

The testing continued the following morning. Perrin Reslic, who had recovered from the backflow from the transmitter, had them operating the full range of weapons they had learnt to use. They started with staves and swords, which required them to perform exercises requiring strength and control and moved on to high-tech projectile and beam weapons. These latter required them to spot and hit targets at the extremity of the weapon’s range. They needed to keep their aim steady, and if necessary, adjust their aim to allow for wind and trajectory.

Even though they thought they had done well, Perrin Reslic gave them no confirmation. He simply told them to get lunch and meet him at the natatorium afterwards.

In the pool, the exercises Perrin Reslic set them were easy enough. They used the different forms of moving across the air/gas interface of the pseudo-aqua, and on each lap were challenged to increase their speed. The blue-green gas was not exactly like water. To go faster, Tymos and Kryslie had to use their power to decrease their apparent mass. At the end of twelve laps of the long ‘pool’, Perrin allowed them a rest as he explained their next test.

“You’ve had practice moving in the pseudo-aqua, and now you are about to have a lesson in diving,” Perrin explained and he saw both Tymos and Kryslie nod. They had both seen two of the level alpha students arrive, and now they were dressed in the streamlined costumes used for ‘swimming’ in the pseudo-aqua.

“Leith and Tomma will demonstrate,” Perrin instructed them. “You will copy them.”

With their attention on the older students, Tymos and Kryslie observed silently and commented between themselves.

“They are going to test us doing something we have never done before?” Tymos thought at his sister.

“Maybe it is not difficult,” Kryslie suggested.

The older students were experts, and made their dives look effortless and graceful. They began with horizontal dives into the shallow end of the pool, and made them seem like water birds gliding into land on water. Their medial dives, when vertical movement had to be converted into horizontal, were graceful curves. When they dived from the high board, they entered the water without disturbing the gas interface.

Students did not learn diving until level beta. Therefore, when Tymos and Kryslie were directed to try a horizontal dive they were like planks thrown onto water. The pseudo-aqua gas spouted up and settled onto the solid floor around the pool.

Even with advice from Leith, their medial dives were like bricks dropping from a height. Both Tymos and Kryslie floundered back into the normal air, and only then swam gracefully to the edge of the pool.

Perrin Reslic wore his, ‘not good enough’ expression.

“It seems you still have much to learn in power control,” he said neutrally. “I expected better. You will now try the high board.” He watched Tymos and Kryslie glance up, and seemed to smile faintly.

Silently, Kryslie remarked to her twin, "I think he wants us to perform poorly. If I could have more practice, I know I would be good at this."

"They can't expect perfection first time," Tymos told her. "This might just be seeing how we control our power doing unfamiliar things." Aloud he asked, "How deep is the pseudo-aqua here?"

"Ninety-three feet," Perrin stated blandly. "Deep enough so even bricks dropped from the high board don't hit the bottom."

Kryslie kept her face bland and mentally commented, "Is it you, or me, that he is trying to annoy today?"

She listened with part of her mind to the explanation of, "the idea is to slow after you enter the medium by decreasing your apparent density, like with swimming, and turn in a curve to resurface."

Although they watched Leith and Tomma, all they could see were the graceful downward dive, and the controlled re-emergence.

Tymos tried first, and Kryslie experienced the sensation as a silent observer in his mind. When her turn came, her initial dive was slightly better. However, until she actually took her first dive, the full sensation wasn't imprinted in her senses.

She knew enough to hold her breath, but she had gone deeper into the pseudo-aqua than ever before, and her return to the surface was not graceful and controlled, but 'urgent'.

Tymos had shared that dive as an observer in her mind, and remarked, mentally. "I think I have the feel for this now. I reckon we could reach the bottom if we tried."

"He said we were too slow," Kryslie thought back at him as he went to climb up to the high board again. He was to, "Try doing it better this time."

"He sounds like we have been trying to get it right for weeks, or he thinks we aren't trying," Tymos thought back as he prepared to dive. "He must be getting back at me for yesterday," he went on.

"After this try, let's ask him to let us dive together to see if we can do it in perfect synchronisation. That would take control and coordination – won't it?"

Tymos was taking preliminary deep breaths. "Indeed it would, and we can both go to the bottom and back."

Perrin merely said, "That will do for today," when Tymos climbed back onto the paved area again. He watched Kryslie dive and surface, better than her first try, but still with less grace than the level alpha students.

Tymos put their suggestion to Perrin, but did not mention the intention to try for the bottom. He had his face quite sober when he said, "Krys and I would like to test our awareness of each other in this medium, now that you seem satisfied with our initial individual attempts."

Perrin gave him a piercing look, but he was well aware of how they anticipated each other's actions in other activities. He saw no reason to forbid the attempt, and was interested to see the result.

"Go on then," he agreed.

In fact, their instinctive timing impressed Perrin. When they jumped on the high board to build momentum, they were in perfect step and when they dived, they both touched the surface of the gas in the exact same split second. This time they entered cleanly, hardly disturbing the interface.

As was his habit, Perrin counted seconds after a student dived. He had his own honed awareness of how long it should take a diver to return to the surface. His mental count reached the limit, and neither Tymos nor Kryslie had surfaced. He called to the two level alpha students and sent them up to the high boards. He was removing his own outer tunic when two heads topped the surface. While they swam to the edge, he resettled his tunic, recalled the older students with a gesture, and walked to meet the two as they climbed from the pool.

To his experienced eyes, he knew they had gone down to the bottom where some of the pseudo-aqua settled into the sediment. They had traces of the sludge on their fingertips from when they reached the bottom, and more on their feet from when they had turned and pushed back up. He might have been impressed; reaching the bottom took both power and control, but to do it with so little training was irresponsible.

“That was an incredibly foolish stunt,” he told them with his anger controlled. He had been frightened for several minutes, thinking the High King’s heirs had injured themselves. “When you have cleaned up, you will run around the distance track for an hour. You can be sure my brother will hear about this.”

He was not mollified with the two accepting nods. It was obvious to him that neither Tymos nor Kryslie were repentant.

He watched them walk to the airing off room, where the traces of pseudo-aqua would be blown off them, and growled to himself. Those two were getting too full of themselves.

Tomma was in the airing room before them. “Even our level is not allowed to try for the bottom,” the older boy said with a mixture of awe and warning. “It really is a dangerous thing to do. And if you haven’t noticed, you made old Perrin very annoyed.”

“It seems so,” Tymos agreed neutrally.

When the other boy went out, Kryslie merely remarked, “He didn’t let us get the proper feel for the exercise. He was restricting us to beginner level, and not giving us a chance to show how fast we could learn. If they are trying to test our skill and how well we control our power – I think we showed him that.”

“And he will consider us irresponsible brats,” Tymos noted, mildly. “But I am not going to hide the fact that I have a mind of my own – that I know how to use. I will not be an obedient sheep.”

After completing the hour’s run, on a track cleared of the frozen zekon, they were tired but they did not choose to transmit back to their apartments. They decided to walk, letting the ever-present guards catch up to them. Even without consciously drawing on the energy around them, they felt it filling them and making them less tired.

When they reached their apartments, their attendants had a change of clothes ready for them, and a summons for them to go to the High King’s suite.

To their relief, Tymoros wasn’t there waiting to give them a reprimand. They both knew they deserved one.

Instead, Tanya brought Llaimos out to them. “He has been more settled today and has two new teeth.”

Kryslie took her brother and told him how clever he was. They shared a relaxing half hour before Tymoros arrived. He looked them both over and made no comment on the day’s testing.

“Tomorrow, you will present yourselves to Alexon for a physical examination directly after breakfast. Following that, you will see Rogert for a full psychological evaluation. Then you will come to my sanctum and wait to be summoned.”

Neither Tymos nor Kryslie doubted that the final summons would be about whether they had passed to level delta. They meekly acknowledged the information and went down to the Great Hall for their evening meal.

Chapter 32 - Mind Meld

The three Governors met in the shielded Conference Room. With them were all the teachers that were closely involved in training the High King's heirs. Each teacher spoke in turn, answered any queries and departed. Perrin Reslic waited until last to speak his piece.

"All that is fine," he said, referring to the previous reports. "I was not impressed with the stunt they pulled in the natatorium yesterday. I did not tell them to try for the bottom of the diving pool."

His brother raised his brows and recalled a long ago memory of Perrin doing the same thing.

"I expect you did not tell them not to," Jono Reslic said evenly. "How did they do? Any problems?"

"No," Perrin growled. "It only took them three minutes longer than normal to surface after the dive, the cocky little..."

His brother silenced him with a look and asked, "What else can you tell us?"

Perrin reported fully and fairly, and summarised, "I have been testing them since you put them on the accelerated study course. No matter what drill I set them – they do it flawlessly. They are better than the Level Alpha students."

"The surprise test the day before yesterday – have you any extra comments?" Xyron asked.

"He used Tonnik's transmitter," Perrin told him. He didn't comment on the backflow he had received.

"It proves that he understood the theory, and deduced that we limit the capabilities of the student's devices. He does have the power to use any transmitter on the estate," Xyron revealed. "Both Tymos and Kryslie could use a transmitter outside of the estate's power grid without needing an independent power source."

"It is still wrong for a student to use someone else's unit," Perrin insisted.

"How do they perform when they do not realise they are being tested?" Tymoros asked.

"Usually they are obedient and sensible enough and do their best. I would phrase that as they don't always have insane whims to act on."

"I understand that yesterday was their first try at diving," Tymoros queried.

"Yes. I wanted to see their power control in an unfamiliar activity. I had two of the level alpha students demonstrate the technique for horizontal, medial and high dives. They did well enough, better than some students who have been learning for months."

"I suspect that doing well enough was not sufficient," Tymoros suggested. "They know they are being tested and wanted to show you their best and were perhaps testing their own limits."

"It was still irresponsible!" Perrin insisted.

"Perhaps," Xyron admitted. "However, I don't think it was unconsidered. They did act together."

Perrin growled softly.

"And how did they react to your chastisement?" Tymoros asked.

"They went off calmly and ran for the hour," Perrin admitted.

"Then they accepted that they deserved censure for doing what was not normally permitted," Tymoros remarked.

Jono Reslic asked, "Have you any other comments to make?"

"No, except if you want them pushed any higher – you'll test them yourself," Perrin proposed.

"I have been," Jono Reslic admitted. "Tymos is almost my equal in fighting skills, and did manage to disarm me. I can't fault him there. Kryslie is better at defence, but she can hold her own with me now."

Perrin betrayed his surprise by raising his eyebrows. "There you have it then. All you have to do is prevent them acting on rash impulses." He bowed to the Governors and turned to depart after receiving a hand gesture of dismissal from his brother.

While Perrin had been reporting, Elder Tymori had entered unobtrusively. He now moved closer to be acknowledged.

"Uncle, was there something you wished to share with us?" Tymoros invited.

"Yes, Governor Tymoros," Timenon acknowledged formally. He bowed slightly to each of the Governor's, and then stood straight, keeping his joined hands hidden in the sleeves of his robe. "The convocation of Elders have meditated on the future custodians. We all agree that they must emerge from within the protection of the estate to learn more of the people and lands that they will one day need to protect. Are they ready? I sensed that Perrin has doubts."

Reslic summarised, "We have tested them repeatedly and can find no flaws in their power control. They have learnt to control their emotions and their psychic gifts."

Xyron continued, "Our main concern is that they have only been learning from us for a year. There is still a great deal that they have not had a chance to learn."

Tymori waited for Tymoros to add his observations. When he did not, Tymori encouraged, "You know them best, what do you feel?"

"That they are still very young and inexperienced," the High King summarised. "My instincts tell me that they will not fail us, but I fear to lose them after knowing them for such a short time."

"There is still the third," Tymori ventured. "Llaimos is still a child, and in our visions of the coming conflict, he is a man."

"My youngest son is growing rapidly," Tymoros told the Elder.

"We know of that, but if he is the third, as Princess Kryslie foresaw, it will be a year yet before he is fully adult. That is assuming he keeps developing at the same rate," Tymori proposed.

"How can we train him in just a year," Tymoros pointed out. "His sibs were much older when they began to learn here. My instincts are a telling me that we will not have a full year before the custodians must act. The Aeronites are aware of these children now, and have already tried to remove them."

"It is our duty to protect the custodians and prepare them as well as possible," Tymori acknowledged. "Have you considered the ceremony for those ascending to supreme rank? How each of you received the knowledge of the generations of past governors?"

"The Guardians grant us that knowledge," Xyron remarked, but he saw where the idea had merit. "However, we are not in the scared temple."

Tymori reminded Xyron, "You do not need to be within the temple to invoke the Guardians of Peace."

"No," Reslic said quietly. "You are suggesting a mind meld, using the Sword of Judgement as the conduit."

The Elder bowed. "It would also serve the purpose of confirming the rightness of the custodians chosen by the Guardians. If you doubt their readiness, have them touch the sword."

After Tymori departed, the Governors considered the idea of the mind meld.

"The Elder is correct," Xyron murmured. "When the time comes for the custodians to act, they will need to know everything possible. What would take years of conventional education, they need now. But more importantly, our knowledge and experience, and that of our predecessors, would benefit them in learning judgement."

"They are already telepathic," Tymoros considered. "So the procedure will be less overwhelming. And their power is equal to ours, and that not their full potential."

"I am not against a five way mind meld," Reslic made clear his sentiments. "But they will receive many impressions from our minds that are extraneous to the necessity of their training. If

we proceed with the mind meld, it should be done on a deep level so that the memories and impressions that they receive will surface only when they require the specific information.”

“That can be done,” Xyron assured them. “I think it would be appropriate to use the room of the Seven Ages. Let us go there and prepare ourselves. I will send a messenger to bring them there.

“How long has it been now?” Kryslie asked her brother, as she rose from the padded chair and began to pace their father’s sanctum. “They have been meeting since before we started the med and psych examinations.”

“Ten minutes longer than the last time you asked,” Tymos muttered from the chair where he was leaning forward and clutching his stomach.

“I wish they would hurry. I am so hungry that my stomach is cramping. Unlike you, I couldn’t eat lunch, and I am still not sure I could,” Kryslie grumbled.

“I wish I hadn’t eaten,” Tymos muttered. “Or can’t you feel the pressure this time?”

“Perhaps that was why I couldn’t eat,” Kryslie agreed, finally realising the true reason for the tension in her muscles and stomach. “What’s this one – the thirteenth tremor this week?”

“Yeah,” Tymos agreed. “Eight more than the scientists reported. At least this one feels like it is going to be right away near the ocean. The build up isn’t as bad as that one the other day.”

“There is no way these tremors can be natural,” Kryslie said forcefully. “Until recently, there had never been quakes on this continent. It has to be those aliens, but I don’t know how – I would sure like to go and stop them. Not that we would be allowed. And that being the case, I’d like to know why it’s so important that we go on this tour. After all, there’s always the next one.”

“Do you want to wait? I don’t,” Tymos countered. “Though why do you think it is taking so long to discuss us? Could we have failed?” Tymos asked uneasily.

“No. How could we? Not with all that extra coaching we’ve had since Father announced he was taking us on tour.”

“Perhaps our demonstration in the natatorium yesterday is being held against us?” Tymos suggested, stifling a groan of pain.

“That shouldn’t – we proved we can control our power, consciously,” Kryslie stated. “Wish I had the knack of blocking this pressure echo in my gut, though. None of our instructors have this problem and have no idea how to deal with it.”

“If we had time to think we might think of a way,” Tymos thought.

The arrival of the green clad attendant distracted them.

“Are the Governors ready for us now, Aldiv?” Kryslie asked.

“Yes, Princess Kryslie.”

Aldiv bowed to both of them. “I am to bring you to them.”

“Finally!” Tymos sighed, and straightened up and rose from the chair. Kryslie knew he referred to the easing of the stomach cramps as the ground trembled – too far away for anyone at the palace to feel it. She felt the same relief, though Aldiv did not realise that the comment was not a reply to his message.

“You cannot expect such an important evaluation to be hurried, Prince Tymos,” Aldiv told him in a tone of mild reproof. “Reaching level Delta means you have your power under complete control. They would not wish any doubts to linger about any student as powerful as you both are.”

“What us?” Kryslie feigned innocence. “We aren’t so special. The level Alpha students could still out do us a few weeks ago.”

Aldiv merely bowed again, and said, “It is not acceptable to keep the Governor’s waiting.”

Realising that perhaps Aldiv had said more than he should, Tymos and Kryslie refrained from further comment. They moved to be near Aldiv, allowing him to take them to their appointment.

They expected to arrive in the Conference Room, but instead, they saw the detailed murals that adorned the wall of the Room of the Seven Ages. Aldiv bowed and departed. Tymos and Kryslie bowed, and then stood in a formal stance, waiting for the Governors to speak. Their eyes flicked to observe the faces of each of the Governors, trying to gauge what they were thinking without trying to intrude mentally.

Xyron, sitting next to Reslic behind a curved table, moved a hand to brighten the lights and instigate an anti-intrusion field. Reslic sat back in his chair, seeming to study the children in front of him, noting the departure from a formal 'eyes forward' pose. Tymoros rose and came to greet them.

"There is no need to be formal," he told them, as he came closer. "Sit with us." He gestured to two chairs and then to a position on an arc across from the other Governors.

Tymos and Kryslie took the implied hint and moved the chairs. Their brief glance at each other was merely confirmation of their individual confusion. This was not what they had expected. Being informal with their foster-father was one thing; they had never really been informal with the other Governors. They waited until Tymoros had re-seated himself before they did. However, their posture was stiff.

"We wish to tell you that you have both reached Level Delta. I know you understand the importance of this milestone."

Tymos nodded cautiously. Both his sister and himself, were wondering at the setting of this meeting.

From his seat, Reslic spoke, "You have only had your power for less than a cycle of seasons and training for an even shorter time when normally, children with your strength of power have had many years of study."

For a moment, Kryslie thought he was criticising them. Tymos flicked her a thought, "They sure pushed us though."

After a pause, Reslic continued, "Because of that, we tested you more rigorously than any other students, but you passed easily. We are certain that you do have your power fully under your conscious control. Now you must learn to fully utilise it for the benefit of all our people and for the protection of the Tymorean Trust."

Tymos heard in his mind, "But they still won't let us go out and find those aliens who are causing us so much discomfort." But both of them sensed their foster-father's pride in them.

Kryslie verbalised, "How can we do that if we are not allowed to leave the estate? Or when you will not let us risk ourselves. Those aliens are causing ground-quakes and we feel every one of them building up. There was just another one, over near the ocean."

Xyron glanced at a data pad on a small table next to him. It did have a report of a tremor. "Perhaps you feel that you could find them at work? However, they have cloaked flitters. They are long gone before we can get people to the quake location."

He saw the flash of determination on the two young faces.

Reslic gestured to himself, and then Tymoros and Xyron and commented, "Even we cannot be everywhere. We must always delegate tasks to suitably trained people and only become involved in exceptional circumstances."

"But surely we can do more..."Kryslie blurted.

Tymos turned and seemed to speak to his sister, and made his agreement sound less like a grievance. "It is like his Excellency said, "We've only had less than a year of study." His mind added, "Even if we were pushed five times harder than everyone else. We may not be abysmally ignorant – but obviously we don't know everything."

Kryslie tried to hide her wriggle of disgruntlement by sitting further back in her chair.

"We are not criticising you for wanting to do more," Tymoros said gently. "It is simply that the more knowledge we can give you – the better prepared you will be. Tomorrow we will depart for Dira. We will travel by coach so you will get to experience the lands beyond this estate."

He saw a distant expression come onto his children's faces and wondered at it.

"We saw a glimpse of it from the Room of Stars when we were waiting to meet the Elders," Tymos remarked, but he was recalling the feeling he'd had then. It had seemed important at the time, but for some reason he had forgotten that.

Kryslie mentally commented, "They keep us too busy to think of such things – even the reports of all the sabotage and civil disruptions – we quickly lose focus on them and simply assume that everything necessary is being done."

"Or all they can think of to try – but it is not enough. Those aliens are laughing at us, and thumbing their noses," Tymos thought back.

Aloud, Kryslie said, "I am really looking forward to this tour. Will we be going straight to Dira?"

"Yes. On the way there, we will be skirting towns and villages because we need to arrive before the storms begin. On the way back we will stop at some of the towns and villages that look to Dira and Reva."

"What will we be doing in Dira? Visiting the Temple?" Kryslie asked.

Tymoros smiled. "Yes, if you recall, I told you we would spend the season of storms in the Sacred Temple – meditating with the Elders. You may learn wisdom from them, and perhaps the Guardians will choose to reveal to you the reason for your existence."

"To protect the trust..." Tymos said, then stopped, realising that he did know but like so much else, the memory slipped back out of recall. It annoyed him that he could not remember that, when he had a highly retentive memory for whatever information his teachers put to him. It was like they were being lulled into forgetting anything but their study. He had a surge of irritation. He knew Kryslie shared it, but then he sensed that her mind was elsewhere. She was looking to one side – towards the wall mural. Without trouble, he knew which section of the enormous mural she was concentrating on. Oddly, it showed two tiny figures diving into a pool.

His own eyes scanned the mural backwards from that point and stopped at another odd scene – in this one were two red headed figures in a room with a desk and a blond man.

"In here, I cannot help feeling that we are some inevitable part of Tymorean history," Kryslie said, surprising the Governors. Her irritation was overcome by curiosity. "Even though we were not born here. You knew to expect us, but we still surprised you, didn't we?"

Tymoros rose and walked to a section of the mural. He gestured an invitation to his foster children to join him.

"Many years ago, when my own children died, my father foresaw that I would have heirs in time."

Tymoros pointed to a tiny picture of two red headed babies set apart from a tiny depiction of himself.

"Who those tiny babies were, was unknown until shortly before your arrival. One of the Elders saw, or sensed your power rising in a vision from the Guardians. From him, we knew we had to find you."

He moved along the mural towards the end and pointed to the section that had caught Tymos's eye.

"Those two...that's us," Tymos stated. He thought he should recall the scene.

"Why is there a faint glow around the figures?" Kryslie asked.

"Perhaps because the Guardians of Peace were shielding you," Tymoros suggested. "Come further, look how the mural is changing."

They walked to be level with the last image, next to a section of blank wall. This was the scene that had caught Kryslie's attention – the two diving figures. Yet as they looked, a new picture was forming.

"What... is causing that?" Tymos asked, amazed. He reached out to the wall. It felt like a perfectly ordinary wall, lined with a smooth synthetic material.

Two red heads, one with his own face, were surrounded by three who wore the robes of state of the Governors of Tymorea. The tall red head had his arms around the two children, even as Tymoros had now. Then, in a fainter degree, a third red headed child became visible.

Reslic spoke from behind the group. "Our history is of a living power and it is recorded in this room. Your achievement today is an important event."

Xyron, from his chair, added, "There are many details on these walls that even we do not fully comprehend. Often meanings become clearer – or we are enlightened – through meditation."

With seeming irreverence, Tymos thought at Kryslie, "Why is our diving into the pool an important event? Was it because we decided to act on our own instincts?"

She thought back, "Where might it be important to dive? Or is that an analogy for something else?"

Tymos mentally shrugged, returning with, "Not in the pool here, that's for sure."

While Tymoros pointed out other scenes, Tymos found his eyes straying to ambiguous scenes that might refer to the hidden doings of alien saboteurs. The urge to go out and face those aliens stirred strongly. Surely, that was the reason for their existence.

Tymoros realised that his children were no longer attending to his words and he sighed inwardly. "I know that you are both impatient to help resolve the current situation caused by the alien infiltrators," he said, regaining their attention. "And we have said, repeatedly that you still have a lot to learn. We know of a technique that may help. Would you be willing to share a period of meditation with us?"

Two heads nodded agreement, with neutral expressions.

"We will, in effect, be melding our minds," Tymoros warned. "Only in that way, can we share with you some of our experience and wisdom."

"We would be honoured, Father," Kryslie said with a faint bow. Her eagerness was barely restrained. "Then – would we be allowed to do more?"

Tymoros made no promises, just suggested, "Will you help move the chairs closer, so we can form a joined circle?"

They kept the small table in the centre of them all and then Reslic laid the unsheathed Sword of Judgement upon it.

Kryslie eyed it, recalling clearly when she had touched it once before. She also remembered that the Sword had disempowered that aliens caught on the estate. Once again, some indefinable urge made her reach out to touch it. This time, Tymos copied her.

The Governors watched, not alarmed. They saw the stillness that overcame the children in that moment of touching it. Whatever message the Guardians had given them, it was not sensed by those nearby.

From determined and almost mutinous, the faces of Tymos and Kryslie seemed to become resigned. They withdrew their hands and sat back into their chairs.

"Is there a message you might share with us?" Reslic asked quietly. He, of all the Governors, had most contact with the Guardians of Peace.

Tymos was quiet for a moment, and then tried to verbalise what he had sensed.

"Wait. We are to wait...and learn...listen and consider." He stopped, trying to verbalise the message in the rest of the contact. Kryslie finally found the words.

"The real enemy is still hidden," she interpreted.

"Was there more?" Reslic asked, leaning forward.

Kryslie shook her head. "The images are fading, but all that is clear is that it is not yet time for us to act. But how will we know when it is the right time?"

"You will know," Tymoros assured them. "If you keep your mind open to the Guardian's wisdom. Come, join hands with us and we can learn from each other."

With the five chairs placed so each person could reach hands and take the hands of those on either side, a link was formed. Tymos had Kryslie on his right and Xyron on his left. On Kryslie's right was Tymoros, with Reslic in the middle of the two other Governors. All were well trained in the art of meditation. Soon Tymos and Kryslie were deeply oblivious to their surroundings.

They felt the gentle touch of the Governors' minds and seemed to become part of them. For what seemed like hours, the five minds melded, receiving images, knowledge, ideas, intuitions and wisdom from each other. Finally, the five minds separated. Hands fell limply.

In the time of sharing, all the knowledge and wisdom of the Governors had been given to those who were destined to play so great a role in the future of the planet. Each of the five minds needed time after the meld for solitary meditation to consider what they had learnt. Even the Governors, for they had come to know more of what these children were to become.

Tymos and Kryslie found the details they had learnt slipping away from them as so many other details had done. They remembered that they had shared a mind meld with the Governors and the loss of details worried them for a while until they realized that when they needed the information it would be available to them.

The Governors reinforced this belief and then dismissed them to prepare for their journey that was to begin next morning.

Chapter 33 - Saying Goodbye

Tymos went to his apartment and surprised Morov as he was packing a large leather satchel with travelling clothes.

“I did not expect you back just yet,” Morov covered his surprise. “Is there something you need?”

“No, Morov, I was told to get ready to leave tomorrow, but it seems like you have that under control.”

“Except for what personal things you might like to take,” Morov countered. “A data pad, study materials and so forth.”

“Boring, Morov! Or will they really try to make us study while we travel. We deserve a break, surely.”

The attendant tactfully shrugged.

“I think there will be enough new things to take in without needing to study stuff from a data pad,” Tymos decided.

“Yes, you may be right. I am looking forward to this trip. It will be my first away from the estate,” Morov admitted.

Tymos looked at him in surprise. “Don’t they normally let you go away?”

“Oh, yes, we can go visiting the cities if we want to, but I have never bothered,” Morov explained. And then, as if deciding he had been too familiar with his charge, Morov went on. “Will you be dining here this evening?”

With a shake of his head, Tymos said, “Stenn will want to skewer me if I don’t put in appearance in the Great Hall to say goodbye to my friends.”

Then, since he didn’t have anything to do that Morov wasn’t covering, Tymos went to the High King’s suite and found Tanya.

“How’s our little man been today?”

She nodded at a corner of the suite. Llaimos was moving around under the watchful eye of his nurse. A cleared area of wall was displaying pictures and a speaker had simple lessons and stories coming from it.

“Stenn wasn’t kidding when he said he was teaching Llaimos to crawl,” Tymos remarked, impressed.

“He has been good today,” Tanya noted.

“No one has been pounding on us today.” Tymos gave Tanya a smile and went to sit near his brother, and unshielded his mind. Before long, the now mobile infant climbed onto him, and Tymos sensed delight from him.

“Learning stuff, bro?” Tymos tickled Llaimos in the ribs, making him gurgle. “How was the nursery last night? Did you meet the other youngsters?”

The yawn may have been a coincidence.

“Long day, huh?” Tymos asked. “We will be having a few of those from tomorrow. That is when we leave on tour with father.”

To prove that Llaimos understood, he gave a whimper and clung more tightly to his brother.

“Hey, what did I say? Do you want to come?” Tymos received the sense that Llaimos wanted to hide. Kryslie suddenly appeared and came over.

“I don’t think he wants us to go,” Tymos told his sister. Llaimos turned and reached out for Kryslie. She took him and felt he was trembling.

“What ever is wrong?” Kryslie asked her little brother.

In her mind, she saw the figure 3, the word three and three objects, like seen on a child’s counting poster.

“I am not sure what you are meaning, bro,” Kryslie told him. Llaimos hugged her tighter. “Oh, we all belong together. I know we do, little bro, but for now, we can do things and learn things that you can’t yet. We will share what we learn with you.”

Llaimos began to tremble again.

“Why are you afraid?” Kryslie asked. “You will be safe here. And now, Tymos and I can handle any danger we meet outside.”

Tymos, sharing the emotions Llaimos sent, added quietly and confidentially, “I know there are people out there who wish us ill, but we have got much stronger and cleverer since they encountered us. Krys and I, together, can give them more trouble than they can handle.” He sent a sense of amusement. “And you will be safe here. You are the most important person on the entire estate – after the Governors of course.”

Llaimos was still emitting fear.

“Tell you what, bro. What if I ask our friends, Stenn, Jonko and Keleb to visit with you while we are away? I will ask that they be kept informed of our progress, so they can tell you. Then you will know we are okay.”

The fear subsided and Stenn’s face came into Tymos and Kryslie’s mind.

“You like Stenn, don’t you? I’m not surprised. He’s got enough younger sibs, so he can teach you all sorts of advanced stuff...like walking.”

Eagerness had replaced all other emotions in the child’s mind. Tymos flashed his sister a grin.

“Your nurse can’t keep up with you now, you cheeky brat,” Tymos teased. Then he whispered, “Go for it, bro! Now, what say we go and try that wooden jigsaw I see over there? You can show me how clever you are.”

When it was time for Llaimos’s next feed, Tymos and Kryslie left the suite to go down to the Great Hall. It was still early, so they chose to walk out onto the zekon-covered terrace until the dinner chime. Both had, without conscious thought, strengthened their mind shields so that Llaimos would not receive from them.

They spoke aloud. “I wonder if Llaimos has been hearing those odd voices.” Tymos said quietly.

“How would we know?” Kryslie asked. “We can’t be in rapport with his mind all day and night. And, surely no one would hear them inside?”

“No one that we know of,” Tymos agreed. “But we are stronger telepaths than most people and Llaimos might be as well. Besides, most people are busy all day.”

“Rather than risking it isn’t true, we should mention the idea to father. There has to be a way to block it. Something like what they did to stop your mind being available to me,” Kryslie proposed. As she thought that, an entire mind full of technical data seemed to flow through her mind, but it quickly faded from memory.

Tymos shook his head to clear it from a similar experience. “If we wanted to send to him while we were away it would block us too.”

“We don’t even know if we have that sort of range,” Kryslie looked speculatively at her brother. “We haven’t had a chance to test that, have we?”

“Well, if we do have that range...we’ve never tried to send to our friends, either.”

Tymos grinned as he said that. “Let’s try it at dinner tonight – on Stenn, Jonko, Keleb, Lexina and Denlic.”

They entered the Great Hall after the dinner chime, chose a place to sit and waited for their friends. Stenn arrived first. “So you are off tomorrow. Lucky people!”

“Must admit, I am eager to be going,” Tymos admitted. “Though Krys and I want to ask you a favour.”

“Sure,” Stenn agreed at once.

“While we are gone – keep an eye and ear out for Llaimos.”

“No problems. Why though?” Stenn asked.

Kryslie answered. “Probably nothing, but we just have the feeling he doesn’t want us to go and is afraid we will get into trouble we can’t handle.”

“And we are not sure he is not picking up on some stray thoughts...like Zacary and I did,” Tymos added.

“Ah!” Stenn immediately understood. “I will be able to keep him company before and after lessons, and I am sure the others of level epsilon will share the duty.”

“I was thinking mainly Jon and Kel,” Tymos murmured.

“Lexina and Denlic too,” Kryslie added. “Though I have nothing against those who have come into Epsilon since we began private lessons again.”

“They will help,” Stenn assured them. “And I will ask my illustrious father if he will let me sleep in the nursery.”

“I am sure he will have something expressive to say about that,” Kryslie grinned.

Stenn grimaced, and then grinned. “No doubt, but I won’t let him claim Llaimos needs to have less instant attention.”

“Thanks,” Tymos said, meaning it. “We don’t expect trouble...but...”

“But...if they see the need to keep you two highly guarded...Llaimos should be too,” Stenn said shrewdly. “And not assume that because he is only an infant that he won’t get into any trouble.”

“Ye...es,” Kryslie emphasised the affirmative and glanced at her ever present guard and the hovering Delia.

“I’ll brief the others. Was there anything else?”

“No. I promised the bro that I would get news of us to him – to assure him we are okay. We are going to ask father to send messages to you to pass on since we don’t know if we can think at him from that far away.”

“So, the little man can talk to your minds then?” Stenn stated calmly. “Like you two do together.”

“Not talk yet, not really. It’s more emotions,” Kryslie clarified. “How did you know we could?”

Stenn gave her a look, trying to imply it was obvious. “This and that?” he said, unhelpfully.

Silently, Tymos tried a test. “You are a smart so-and-so, aren’t you, Stenn?”

His friend turned and faced him. “Wow!” His face had an incredulous expression. “Can you do that to everyone?”

“Haven’t tried. We were keeping it secret,” Kryslie told him. At Stenn’s querying expression she added, “Yes, your father knows. He insisted on teaching us to block each other out.”

Stenn smiled. “Just as well. Sometimes you each might want some privacy, like...”

Tymos flushed and said quickly, “We’ll try it on the others.”

They spotted Jonko first. He came in with Tobias. Tymos sent, “Jon, what is so interesting about plants, plants and more plants?”

The target of the thought visibly jumped, and even Tobias noticed. Jonko looked around, spotted Tymos and apologised to Tobias before coming over. As he approached, he thought in his mind, “Tobe’s a nice person and he doesn’t have many friends.”

In return, he felt in his mind a mental chuckle. “And so are you for recognising it. Come join us. We are leaving tomorrow and have a favour to ask.”

“I can’t see Kel yet,” Kryslie murmured to Tymos as Lexina and Denlic found them.

“Keleb said he will be along soon,” Denlic explained on hearing her soft comment. “He was hoping you would appear down here tonight, but then he saw they had brought up some carriage beasts...and just had to go see them.”

“I always thought they kept animals off the estate,” Kryslie commented, though the answer to that came to her mind as Denlic answered.

“Usually, but since your father is going off on tour tomorrow...early...they brought them up so the servants can hitch up the carriages...even earlier...” he left the warning dangling.

Kryslie felt around with her mind for a sense of Keleb and told Denlic, “I think you had better save some food for him. He is in the throes of rapture.” She tried to speak to his mind, and whilst he recognised her, he was simply revelling in being close to the animals and helping to groom them after their trip up from the nearby farming town.

To Tymos, she spoke mentally, “I can reach him, but I think it’s more empathic than telepathic. I can read back from him.”

“Lexina and Denlic are much the same,” Tymos told her, still mentally. “They can receive what I send, but I have to read their replies in their mind. Stenn is clearest, then Jonko.”

To the group, Tymos stated, “I’m starving – don’t know why. We haven’t really done much all day.”

They stayed late in the Great Hall, deliberately ignoring hints from their attendants that they should have an early night. Even when they finally left their friends, they didn’t go straight to bed, but went to visit Llaimos in the nursery. Stenn slipped in before they left there with a satchel of clothing, and gave them a broad wink when he took Llaimos from Kryslie.

“Go! Shoo!” Stenn grinned. “We will see you when you get back!”

Sensing that Llaimos was happy – they went.

Chapter 34 - Journey to Dira

Those that were to be a part of the Royal Tour awoke well before dawn and breakfasted in their rooms. When dressed in plain brown travelling clothes, they assembled with their packs in a curtained off section of the Great Hall. The entourage consisted of the High King and his two eldest children, their attendants, a full contingent of security guards and the Elders from the palace who were travelling to Dira for the seasonal pilgrimage to the Sacred Temple.

A detachment of the Tymorean Peace Corps was travelling with the group to act as scouts and messengers. Tanya carried Llaimos to the hall so that she could say her own private farewells to her husband and foster children. She would watch their departure from the upper levels of the palace in the nurseries with the other Royal Children.

The entire entourage transmitted in small groups to the gates of the Estate, where their transportation awaited them.

The High King and his children were to ride within a covered coach that bore the Royal Crest of the High King. The Elders would ride in similar but unadorned coaches. The attendants had standing room on the back of the coaches. The security guards and the members of the Peace Corps rode on horses similar to those that would pull the carriages.

The carriages used by all the Governors and Elders had arrived by long-range beam from storage caverns on the ground level of the mesa. The crimson enamelled outer surfaces had been polished to a high gloss and they sparkled in the morning light. The horses' white coats gleamed and their manes and tails shone like gold. Their breath condensed in the cold air like silver clouds.

Servants secured the last of the travelling packs onto the roof of the coach as Tymos and Kryslie shadowed the High King up the pull out steps and into the coach. Tymoros elected to sit facing the direction of travel, and smiled in amusement as his children fidgeted between the three other seats. He was enjoying their excitement.

"You will need to settle down," he advised them. "The road down is steep and narrow. The horses are not used to wildly bouncing carriages."

Obediently, Kryslie settled beside Tymoros and Tymos sat opposite her. Their behaviour returned to the correct royal demeanour, until the carriage began to move, and then they both pulled aside the moving glass panels and let in a blast of frigid air. Tymoros pulled his warm travelling cape around him and continued to smile.

Two heads protruded from the windows of the carriage as it paused at the staging area outside the gate. He heard two sighs of awe as the vista of open space and undisturbed zekon came into view. Beyond the flat area were zekon-frosted forests that might have been on a completely virgin world.

Kryslie breathed deeply of the clean air, recognised a hint of tree resin, and suddenly felt as if some binding had been broken and she was newly free. In her mind, she sensed that her twin felt the same way but with an added sense that he had left a part of himself behind.

"Back there is our home – and Llaimos is there – but out here is where we belong," she mentally whispered.

He replied, with a little awe, "It is like something out here is calling to us."

The carriage began moving down the zigzag road to the base of the mesa. Tymos and Kryslie continued to stare out of whichever side faced the wide-open space. They took the opportunity to enhance their sight to study distant details. In recent days, they had investigated the archives, seeking information on the nearby towns and cities and what they might expect to see. In the same searches, they had come across the information about the caverns within the

mesa. Within that sheer sided hill under the palace, were caverns, some even bigger than the ones Tymos had seen. One huge cavern housed a fleet of small messenger ships, used to take messages to distant places that were far from the network of long-range beams. Tymos recalled mention of the Tymorean Space fleet, and wondered where those ships were kept. Then he wondered if there were other airships that they might have used to get to Dira instead of the carriage. Though thinking further, Tymos decided he preferred the slower method, as it would give him a closer view of the world.

The tour party halted at the base of the mesa for the last of the carriages to complete the downward path and for the horse mounted scouts to spread out ahead of the group. When the horses once again drew the carriages forward, Kryslie put her head out the window to see where they were going, as Tymos stared back at the cliff and the barely perceptible way down.

The carriage made clear tracks in the zekon, leading away from the mesa and across the open plain. Just before the carriage entered the forest, Tymos drew his sister's attention to the view behind. The mesa had retreated into the distance and was far enough back for them to see the morning sun glinting off the palace buildings. They looked like constructions of gold and glass.

Then the trees closed around them blocking the view, and new things caught their attention. The trees were thick, growing haphazardly and unlike the neatly ordered trees in the palace gardens. Although it was still the season of white, the trees were already beginning to bud for the new season. A few cold hardy species of insects chirped, and a few birds flew past. Occasionally they spotted a small creature scurrying back into cover, away from the carriage.

After a short time, they were back out of the trees again, following a road that skirted more of the forest and would through low hills, covered in bushy vegetation and patches of zekon.

"This road marks the outer fringe of the farmlands," Tymoros remarked. "In the warmer months, herd beasts graze here. We will see mainly farmland today, although we will go through several small villages."

Either the folk in those villages knew to expect them, or word had quickly spread, for the local folk lined the road and waved. Cheers erupted when the people recognised the royal symbol on the leading carriage.

When the sun reached zenith, the carriages stopped near a small creek. The accompanying palace guards formed a protective ring and the Pearce Corps scouts rode outward to check the area.

Kryslie was glad to get out and stretch her legs. Tymos joined her as she looked around. On this area, open except near the trees by the stream, the sun had thawed the zekon and grass had already begun to grow in thick tufts.

The wind though, was still chilly even though the sun was shining brightly from a cloudless sky. It felt like spring, since for weeks the sky had remained overcast even when it was not stormy.

Tymos looked outwards, towards a distant range of hills. It seemed to him that as he looked there, the brightness of the sun dimmed – but no cloud had obscured the sun. He felt a shiver run up his spine.

Tymoros joined them after talking to the servants assisting the Elders and preparing the food for lunch. He led the way up to the top of a slight rise.

"The day has been unusually fine for this late in the season," he remarked. "And the zekon here is already beginning to thaw. It seems as if the season of white will soon be over." His attention was on the land further away.

Kryslie squatted to feel the grass. "It feels vibrant with energy."

Tymoros answered her observation. "It is a sign that the season will soon be changing. It seems the season has been short this year. The plants are the first to react to the increase in warmth. Then the animals will feel it."

Abruptly, Tymos said, “Keleb should be with us. To be able to explore his affinity to animals.”

“So should Jonko,” Kryslie quickly added. “Even though he is a warrior, he has more than a passing fascination with plants.”

“I thought he was just being kind to Tobias,” Tymos remarked.

Kryslie shook her head. “No, he was the one to seek out Tobias and suggest a trade – teaching about plants for lessons in weapons. I didn’t say anything because he didn’t want the interest widely known. And, I think he didn’t want you to think him weak, or to betray his gentler side to a rival.”

“I am not his rival!” Tymos argued quietly.

“Yet what Kryslie said is true,” Tymoros interceded, joining Kryslie as she sat on the grass. “You must remember that he is half Terran. Competition is common amongst Terrans. Come and sit down Tymos.”

Tymos sat down on the other side of his foster father from his sister.

“I will arrange for them to join us on our return journey,” Tymoros suggested. “If they can prove they are advanced enough to pass to level Delta.”

“I believe you will find they are ready,” Tymos stated quietly. “I believe they learnt to control their power even before we did.”

“The two of you never cease to amaze me,” Tymoros betrayed his surprise. “When I communicate with my fellow Governors this evening I will arrange for your friends to be tested. I had noticed that Jonko and Keleb were progressing faster than anticipated. We were allowing them a slower rate of learning. It seems that they will progress as fast as we let them. I must remember that your instincts are as excellent if not better than my own.”

“Surely not,” Tymos disagreed. “We are not nearly as wise as you!”

“Instinct is not just based on knowledge and experience,” Tymoros told them. “Often, it is simply knowing what is true. I will say this to both of you – trust your instincts, above wisdom, above knowledge.”

“That goes against all the rationales of your teaching, Father,” Kryslie objected.

“Yes, that is true.” Tymoros readily admitted. “I would not make that an instruction to any one but you and your brother, but my instincts, which I have found to be true, tell me that I am right!”

Tymos and Kryslie could not find an answer to that for they were seeing the implications of their foster father’s confidence in them. In spite of being reminded, often, that they were still children and inexperienced, they wanted to be adults and doing worthwhile things. They knew their power was strong and now it seemed that their Father, who was one of the three most powerful men on Tymoros, considered them his equal. Then they recalled that Reslic had said that they had yet to reach their full potential. It was almost a frightening thought.

“We were created for a reason,” Kryslie thought at her brother, having just recalled another forgotten conversation. “What ever it is... we will need that power.”

“I had forgotten that,” Tymos realised, still only thinking at his sister. “Why is it that we recall all our lessons perfectly and forget such things about ourselves? What else might we have forgotten?”

Mentally, Kryslie shrugged. “We will recall things, given the right stimulus. It seems though, that our minds have been lulled into thinking only of learning. Out here, I feel we must be doing something.”

Tymoros drew his children’s attention from whatever thoughts were occupying them.

“Look, there are some young people approaching.”

Tymos and Kryslie followed the direction of his gaze, down the hill away from the assembled coaches and horses.

“I was wishing we could stop in one or two of the towns to meet people today. It seems I may have part of my wish. They look our age, Father,” Kryslie was eager that the group of six would continue to come their way.

The children were dressed in simple peasant costume. The three girls were in long brown homespun skirts with unbleached linen blouses that were gathered at neck and sleeves and tucked into the skirts. Each had a grey, white and black knotted shawl to keep off the cold breeze. Two boys wore long leggings, and long sleeved tee-shaped shirts. A third boy, who was lagging behind the others, was dressed in what looked like proper grey trousers and a fancier shirt.

As the group drew closer, it was apparent that they were all of different ages. The oldest, one of the girls, wore an apron tied at the waist and she was holding it clasped by the edges. The leading group of five were laughing and wore only sandals on their feet. It seemed that they did not notice the cold.

The children spotted the carriages with the horses having drinks from canvas nosebags. As they headed towards the animals, not noticing the circle of guards, one of the boys spotted the group of three people standing on the rise beside the road. After glancing between the animals and the people, they changed direction.

The guards were alert and seemed, to Tymos’s eyes, to be almost invisible. He noted that strange ability, and stored it to think on later. He returned his attention to the approaching children.

With open friendliness that was pleasing to the travellers, the eldest girl began the ritual greeting.

“Welcome to the Dales of Arrawen. May we offer you the hospitality of our Town?”

“Thank you, child,” Tymoros spoke softly. “We are but passing by this area for we must travel swiftly to reach our destination before the storms begin. On our return it would give us great pleasure to visit Arrawen town.”

The girl smiled and Kryslie returned one of her own. She noticed several flowers extending out of the clasped apron.

“Are you collecting flowers? You have some beautiful ones. Though isn’t it early for flowers to be blooming?”

“There are not many about yet. We have come a long way to find these few. They are for my mother who has been very ill during the Season of White. Even now, she cannot move from her bed to enjoy the mild weather. She so loves flowers.”

Those she spoke to noticed the moisture in her eyes, but she dropped to the ground beside Kryslie to display the collection in her bunched up apron.

“What is your name child?” Tymoros asked gently, with genuine interest. The welfare of his people was always foremost in his concerns.

“Tarri,” the girl answered promptly politely facing the man she answered.

“Your family?” he enquired further, indicating the other children with a sweep of his hand.

“Yes, my sisters Jaime and Anima and my brothers Simi and Toby,” she introduced.

“These are my children Tymos and Kryslie. I am Pyani Tymoros,” the High King introduced.

The children didn’t react to the names and were ignorant of the high position of the strangers.

Kryslie was watching the sixth child while seeming to have her attention on Tarri. The peasant girl had not given that boy’s name and the boy himself was scuffing at the grass tufts with his booted foot and not looking at them. Kryslie turned her attention back to Tarri.

“It was a lovely thought to bring your mother flowers. I hope she will get better soon.”

Tarri’s eyes dropped to the flowers in her apron.

“My mother has become old and frail.” Tarri said unhappily. “The healers can’t help her. I heard them say there was something unnatural about her illness.”

Tymos stood up and walked a short distance away from the group. He idly picked a few of the wildflowers that were growing nearby and formed them into a bunch. He walked back and Kryslie sensing his thoughts gave him a ribbon from her hair to tie around it. Tymos came and knelt in front of the girl.

“Tarri, may I add a small gift to your collection?”

“If you wish,” she agreed, watching Tymos’s face as he dropped the small bunch in with the rest. She flushed slightly when he took her hands.

Tymos’s hands were a faint shade of mauve. The colour spread to the girls hands as Tymos spoke. “Your mother will get well again,” he assured her and the girl seemed to lose some of her unhappiness.

“I believe you,” she said after a while.

One of the boys grinned and nudged his sister.

“Ah, I think I should be getting back.”

Kryslie glanced again at the boy who stayed apart. She caught him staring intently at the group and he quickly averted his eyes. She grabbed her father’s arm and sent a thought to him.

“Who is your shy friend?” Tymoros asked casually without looking at him directly.

“He didn’t tell us his name,” Tarri shrugged.

The boy had good hearing. Knowing he was being discussed he began to back down the hill and start to run. Tarri and her siblings followed him at a walk after bidding the strangers farewell.

“What concerned you about the third boy?” Tymoros asked once the children were out of earshot.

“That boy reminds me of the alien that we saw the night Llaimos was born,” Kryslie told him. “The clothes are not the same and I couldn’t see his eyes clearly but he feels the same to my senses.”

The High King betrayed his concern only by the creasing of his brow. He was silent for a while.

Finally, Tymoros gestured to two of the Peace Corps officers and directed them to follow the strange boy. They rode off on horseback.

The High King and his children returned down the hill to seats set up by a folding table to have their meal.

When he finished eating, he left his children and spoke briefly to his attendant who went off and returned with a communicator. Tymoros reported Kryslie’s comment to the other Governors.

He remained preoccupied as they once more climbed into the coaches and resumed their trip.

Tymos too, was quiet and he was oblivious to the changing scenery. He was pondering the strange urge that had caused him to take the girl’s hands in his own. He had been able to sense details of the illness of the girl’s mother; they had been foremost in the girls mind. He did not understand the sudden surge of power that had occurred as he touched the girl nor his sureness that the sick woman would recover.

They camped that night in canvas shelters with a full complement of guards on duty. Tymos and Kryslie slept deeply, not even waking when the two men returned from searching, unsuccessfully, for the boy.

Kryslie stirred and woke two hours before dawn. The night, which had started as mild and peaceful, had grown unstable as a storm built up. Kryslie did not sit up immediately. She tried to discern what had woken her. Her father and brother were still asleep. She finally crawled out of her sleeping roll, being careful not to wake the others and crept from under the stretched fabric.

She looked around and saw the security men at their posts. They were watchful and had noticed her appearance from the shelter.

Kryslie acknowledged the guard's salute to her with a nod and continued to look around. She saw as a shadow a smaller figure between the trees. A flash of lightning from the storm revealed nothing. The guards had not seen anyone and this time Kryslie could not sense an alien presence.

The young alien continued to watch from behind a tree. He concentrated on keeping his mind blank but it was becoming difficult. Something about the way that young female looked at him, even when he should not be visible in the stealth suit - unnerved him. Earlier in the day, he had risked getting close to confirm he had located his quarry. Then he had been careful not to look directly at any of them. He had eluded the guards sent to track him and come back once it was dark to place a tracker focus on the carriage. It was time to leave and report back to Warlord Kellex who would be very pleased that his information had been correct and that the heathen king had his brats with him.

Xan squashed the uneasy feeling he had when he realised that Warlord Kellex wanted to abduct these children. They seemed nice enough, even when they were only talking to ignorant peasants. However, that was now, as they got older they would become as depraved as their sire. Kellex hoped to teach them differently and if he used them as hostages, maybe the accursed Governors would have to listen to the pleas for help from the Aeronite people.

The following day saw the Royal entourage travelling as fast as the coach horses could take them. There were scout parties riding ahead, behind and to each side of the main party. Kryslie had mentioned her night walk and her belief that she had seen someone watching from in the trees. They believed her even though there were no tracks to support that belief.

The storm had passed before morning and the days travelling had proceeded without any further sign of the observer.

They could not be certain that the boy, if he really was that young, was not still following them. The guards maintained a state of heightened alert during the next two days and nights of travel.

The Royal Party arrived in Dira after darkness had fallen and when the nightly storms were beginning to flash and rumble. The city Elders greeted the travellers and provided them with food and refreshments. Later, after the coaches and animals had been tended and their own comforts seen to, Tymoros led his children to the hill, known to those of Royal Blood as the Hill of Eternity. They each carried their small bag of spare clothes. Security guards accompanied them to the base of the hill where an invisible barrier existed to prevent anyone with no Royal Blood from venturing. At that point, the High King and his children removed their footwear and walked barefoot up the narrow path accompanied by the city Elders who each carried a flaming torch. This was sacred ground to those of Royal Blood for on this hill, according to legend, the Guardians themselves had walked at the beginning of history.

The common people could only watch the Elders walking up to the ancient temple that stood at the peak and know only the most powerful of the Royal Lines could enter the Temple of Creation.

They reached the temple and walked up the entrance steps. All that was visible was the outline of a huge stone structure. To Tymos and Kryslie, the pale stones seemed to glow faintly. Tymoros did not stop, but passed a double row of columns and led his children into a huge open area, lit with glow lights set around the wall. The area was occupied by men and women dressed in long brown belted robes. The Elders greeted the High King and his children with slight bows. Two figures approached, both young, one was Gann Reslic and the other had dark hair.

“Sire, we have prepared your usual chamber. Prince Tymos and Princes Kryslie have chambers assigned on the lower level. Do you wish refreshments before evening devotions?”

Tymos and Kryslie hardly heard Gann speak, they looked around them, impressed by the high vaulted roof, the upper balcony, the magnificent stained glass mural on the wall above where they had entered.

When Tymoros touched their shoulders, they brought their attention back to themselves.

“We will settle in later,” he said.

Gann nodded, and took the carry bags from them. “I will put these in your rooms.”

The Elders began to move to the ring of seats set around a circular, tiled floor mural. Tymoros indicated two seats and Tymos and Kryslie sat on either side of their father, looking around and wondering what was about to happen.

All but one of the Elders sat, while the young acolytes stayed standing behind the seats, with hands hidden in the sleeves of their robes. Elder Tymori began to chant softly and the others took up the solemn sounding refrain.

The ritual devotions, giving thanks to the Supreme Guardians for their gifts of words and wisdom, followed a traditional pattern. At the conclusion, nearly all the Elders retreated to their sleeping cubicles. The exceptions were the two who would maintain a vigil in the Altar Room. This was a smaller room visible from the main gathering area. To get to it, the Elders went into the side passage, and up a short flight of stairs at the end. From below, two flames were visible above the waist high balcony. Faint breezes through the temple caused these oil fed lamps to flicker and cast shadows about the room.

On that first night, Tymoros offered to join the vigil, and he asked Gann Reslic to show Tymos and Kryslie to their assigned cubicles. Gann merely nodded, silently and jerked his head toward the south side passage. His silence lasted until he stopped at one of the curtained off alcoves.

“There are no servants here. If you want something, you get it yourself. We put a cup and water in here, but when it’s empty, you fill it. There is a tap in the washroom down the end of this passage. We get up at dawn for the morning rituals. Breakfast is in the south chamber afterwards. This room is yours, Prince Tymos. The next one is for Princess Kryslie.”

After that, he bowed slightly and withdrew, leaving two slightly bewildered guests watching his departing back.

With a glance at each other, Tymos pulled aside the curtain across the first alcove, and was relieved to see it was empty. Kryslie glanced in and then went to the next room. She didn’t think Gann would try to embarrass them, but she allowed her mind to sense for a presence with in before she entered her room. She said goodnight to Tymos and entered, drawing the curtain again behind her.

Her room was identical to the one assigned to Tymos. A small bed - neatly made, a chair, a narrow cupboard and a tiny bedside table. On the wall was one of the glows, a smaller version of those in the gathering room. It gave enough light to see by, and to find her travelling bag at the foot of the bed.

All those who had travelled to the temple, would spend the season there, tended by the younger people such as Gann Reslic, who were not yet Elders themselves, but students learning their wisdom.

Chapter 35 - The Returnee

Governor Xyron was reading a summary of reports when Governor Reslic walked into his office.

“Ty has arrived safely in Dira,” Reslic announced.

“Any further sightings of that young alien?” Xyron asked.

“No,” was the terse reply. “However, I have received four more reports of sudden violence. Riots broke out in four towns and it seems to be linked to some freakish weather in the outlying regions. Have your scientists learnt anything of that?”

Reslic settled himself into a chair as Xyron shuffled through the reports on his desk, and quickly scanned one. “Not yet. It is believed that the low rainfall and other weather oddities indicate that the aliens have some form of weather control. However Dylon has been in Basiq. He was monitoring an intense storm cell, and out with his equipment when he became aware of an odd smell. He attempted to obtain an air sample. We will have it this evening, but it may not tell us anything. The wind had been blowing at the time and the smell may have dispersed. The riot began just before the storm hit.”

Reslic advised, “I have authorised the local militias to deal with the rioters, but I am loathe to insist on penalties if the people involved were unwitting victims. Does Dylon know how long the rioters were affected?”

“No more than an hour or two. The mayor had people that were not affected take the brawlers into holding rooms. Most collapsed and slept off the effects.”

“What was the report on the water storages?” Reslic switched topics.

“Levels in five of the storages are still falling,” Xyron’s face creased with concern. “Analysis of the seasonal rainfall indicates that less than half of the normal amount fell during the last storm season, and less zekon has fallen than usual. The geologists have located fissures in two of the storage basins. Both are near ancient fault lines and the loci of the strongest tremors. I have issued directions for the other basins to be examined, but it is slow work. It would be easier and quicker to bring the Joshe Rhodin into orbit to do the survey.”

“I do not disagree with you,” Reslic admitted. “But until we locate that alien base ship – I do not want to reveal our strength. However, the Joshe Rhodin and three flotillas of the Space Fleet are rendezvousing at the asteroid belt and another four are on stand-by but I have them searching near space for signs of alien baseships. The first of them can arrive here within hours if we need them. I have advised the ship captains that the crews maybe seconded to supplement the Peace Corps on ground duties.”

“We might need to co-opt the fleet scientists as well,” Xyron sighed. “I have sent crews to the desalination facilities to get them ready for operation - as a precautionary measure. I hope it will not become necessary to pump water to the farmlands. The water shortage will be widespread if we cannot stop the saboteurs.”

“I’ll organise guards for the plants,” Reslic decided. “If our enemies realise they are working – the facilities will become a target.”

“My other major concern is this epidemic that is affecting very young and very old people. We are getting a high mortality rate, and are no closer to isolating the cause. Perhaps we might bring some of the fleet medics down. All my spare doctors are travelling around to support local medics.”

“I’ll organise the scientists and medics,” Reslic promised. He mentally considered many different matters he was overseeing. Then he remarked, thoughtfully, “The Elders’ prophecies are certainly coming true. A time of trouble, followed by a time of great need...Ty suggested that we call a census of all settlements. I have recalled Jonnsen and Konn from the fleet to oversee

that. We have the official population register and the census information will be crosschecked with that.”

“And if some of our enemies try to pass as citizens?” Xyron suggested.

Reslic gave a grim smile. “They won’t be challenged yet, but will be watched. The census officials will be briefed on what to look out for. Since the aliens feel they can move about freely, they will not be suspicious. We can find out who they meet and where they go. I will suggest scanning for message frequencies as well. Then when we act to protect our people, non-Tymoreans will be excluded.”

“When...” Xyron echoed. “Not if. I have my eldest sons overseeing the production of the screens. They are being deployed as soon as...”

Xyron stopped speaking as Yeven transmitted into the room. His abrupt arrival, rather than discreetly knocking, suggested a matter of some urgency. Reslic gestured for his attendant to speak.

“Your Excellency,” Yeven bowed. “Sir, Captain Armon sends his apologies but he requests your attendance at the front gate. There is a person demanding entrance.”

“Did Armon explain who this person is?” Reslic asked evenly.

“No, your Excellency. Only that the person appears to be plague ridden and seems incoherent.”

“I’ll come as well,” Xyron announced. He leant over and used a communicator to brief an emergency medical team.

When Reslic and Xyron materialised near the front gate of the estate, the med team and security team had already arrived. The latter had formed a semi-circular perimeter ten metres from the gate.

Reslic looked past the guards and through the bars of the ornamental iron gate and made a visual examination of the pitiful creature who was pleading for admittance.

The description of plague ridden seemed appropriate as the person had many festering sores on his face, and probably his scalp as well. Flies were buzzing around his head and crawling on his face.

The creature’s clothes were in tatters, falling open to reveal the man’s emaciated frame, and only barely allowing for modesty. The clothes and the flesh beneath were stained with mud, plant matter, and probably various bodily waste substances.

As he watched, the man dropped his hands from where he grabbed the bars, and he collapsed, moaning.

Reslic spoke to Armon who came closer. “Is he armed?”

“No, sir,” Armon reported promptly.

“Bring him in,” Reslic directed.

Xyron nodded at the med team who were clad in full coverage quarantine suits. Two medics lifted a stretcher, and followed two others to the gate. The gate guards pulled the gates open.

As the med team ran a scanner over the man, Xyron took a comm. headset from one of the ring of guards.

“Report when ready,” Xyron directed.

He received an acknowledgement, and watched as one medic examined the flesh under the tatters.

“Sir, this man has numerous infected cuts and lesions. Some look to be animal bites, others like burns. Some indications of bone fractures, and dehydration. His temperature is very high. We can’t tell much more until he is cleaned up.” The report came via a headset built into the suits.

Xyron spoke into his set. “Take him into an isolation room. Initiate full quarantine protocol. The four of you who came near the patient, remain in the isolation room. Do not give the patient anything to eat or drink.”

With the assistance of two security guards, the patient was transmitted directly to the infirmary. The guards also remained within the isolation room.

Xyron followed up those instructions, by directing the remaining four medics. “Decontaminate this area. Anyone who came within five feet of that man are to report to room delta for decontamination – immediately.”

“Sir?” Armon requested Reslic’s attention. “I believe the rags that poor man is wearing were once a Peace Corps uniform.”

“Yes,” Reslic agreed. “Have a squad sent out to back track the man’s route here and liaise with the medics to identify him.”

Xyron delegated the treatment of the patient to Alexon, but oversaw the process from outside the sterilisation field. First, the man’s tattered clothing was stripped from him and placed in sterile bags to be analysed. Then the man was held under a shower of disinfecting and cleansing solution and then walked through a screen of sterilising gamma radiation. If he had the strength, the man would have tried to struggle free for the spray would make the half-healed wounds and open sores, sting.

The gate guards, who had come close to the man, stoically underwent the same process and accepted the sterile coveralls in place of their uniforms.

Alexon, clad in the sealed quarantine suit, glistening from the spray, tried again to question the patient, but only received moans and screams of terror. He was able to check the man’s eyes – they had the white around the iris – so the man was a Tymorean. Then, to make the needed treatment easier, Alexon hypo sprayed a sedative into the man.

Hours later, Alexon reported to Xyron. “You’ll want to report to his Excellency. Armon was right. He is a Peace Corpsman. In addition, he was tortured. I am amazed that he is still alive.”

Xyron’s attention was fully on his brother. “Tortured? How?”

“He has whip marks, cuts, bruises, burns from both fire and beam weapons. There is some residual radiation from a beam type weapon. Some of the wounds went septic – either deliberately or while he was returning. The more recent wounds seemed to be from animal bites, insect bites... his clothes were crawling with insects. He has a broken arm and concussion.”

“When might we speak to him?” Xyron asked.

“Several days...we have cleaned and treated all his wounds. I want to keep him isolated to be sure we have caught all the infections, and he will need time for the concussion to heal. He has woken from the sedative, but he was still not coherent. The fever is going down and he is having pain killing medication.”

“Have you identified him yet?”

“We are running a DNA analysis, but that will only help if we can find a match. I have requested a list of the missing Peace Corpsmen. We might be able to narrow the list down and obtain sample from relatives or their personal quarters.”

“Let me know at once when you identify him,” Xyron directed. “I will speak to his Excellency.”

“We had no success back tracking your patient,” Reslic said, speaking via the internal palace comm system. “The trail was lost some miles east of here. We need to find out where he came from. What else can you tell me that might help trace his movements? .”

“Alexon said his feet were blistered and grazed – as if he had not worn footwear for a long time. He could have walked a long way, but the whip marks are likely over a month old. The bite marks are fresher, perhaps three days. If he was attacked in the far hills, there is no way he could have come here in three days. He was dehydrated and showing signs of starvation. I really do not think he could have walked far.”

“That was my thought too,” Reslic agreed. “Who ever tortured him, wanted him here alive – as a message. You say that the man was wearing a cadet uniform? That narrows the possible down to three. Lukam, Miius and Zacary.”

“I’ll contact the relatives. Zachary lived here did he not?” Xyron asked.

Reslic gave the affirmative.

When the DNA identification came through, Reslic arranged to meet Nairo, the Commander of the Peace Corps.

“Cadet Sergeant Zacary. Yes, he was with the third scout group. What do you need to know, Sir?” Nairo asked.

Reslic quickly recapped what he knew about the returned Corpsman and stated, “We do not believe that he walked all the way back from the mountains.”

“No, Sir. Even at a forced pace, that would not be possible, especially if he was in as poor condition as you said. Nor even if he escaped when the patrol went missing.”

“What is your opinion of Cadet Zacary,” Reslic asked.

Nairo took a moment to recall what he knew. “Zacary was a bit difficult at first but after completing his basic training he proved to be a conscientious young man. He finished third in his training group and graduated as cadet Sergeant.”

“Were you aware that his brother, who worked as a road guard, has been missing for some months? From before the scout party went off?” Reslic asked.

“I was aware of that, Sir. Young Zacary was very concerned. However, we believe that his brother must be dead. His three patrol mates were found in a ravine and we believe they drowned in the river. It is possible that Yuri fell into the river and his body carried down stream, though we have received no reports of any body being found.”

Reslic refrained from voicing his feeling of disquiet.

“I’ll have you question Zacary,” Reslic decided.

Zacary, wearing one of the pale blue isolation robes, sat up carefully, and put his data pad aside, when Commander Nairo entered his room. He was no longer in quarantine, but in the week since he woke up in the infirmary, he had been allowed no visitors. When he looked up again and saw both Governor Xyron and Governor Reslic had also entered, his pale skin flushed uncomfortably under his bandages and lotion daubed wounds. He recalled, still too vividly, his last interview with the Governors – when they had told him that his power would be made dormant. When they had turned him into something little better than a commoner.

Even being allowed to join the Peace Corps had not quelled his resentment – until he had realised that he was a lot smarter than the other cadets were, and his superiors had begun to praise him.

“Cadet Sergeant Zacary,” Nairo greeted. “Are you able to give us a report?”

“Sir, I...I don’t remember everything.” Zacary was glad to be able to turn his attention away from the Governors. He was feeling better now the pain meds were working, but they made his mind fuzzy.

“Tell us what you can,” Nairo encouraged.

“Sir, we left here and reached sector seven-zero. Captain Severin sent scouts out and they found tracks they attributed to mutants. They also saw signs of alien weaponry – scars from tech weapon fire. We split up into pentads to follow the trails, but they didn’t go far.”

“They lost the tracks, or did they just disappear?” Nairo suggested.

Zacary tried to remember what he had been shown and told. “Group Leader Elgin said...the mutants took to the rocks and could have gone anywhere. We never saw actual tracks of aliens, Sir.”

“Go on,” Nairo directed.

“The Captain left half our number in that area and the rest of us moved on. We were two days trek from there, and well into sector seven one when we saw more indications of aliens and a deserted campsite. We split into pentads and scouted the area.” Zacary gulped, remembering.

When urged to continue by Nairo, he said, “We were ambushed, Sir. By a group of very short mutants. Ugly creatures. They dropped weighted nets from the trees and were on us before we could free ourselves. They clubbed us unconscious.”

“And then?”

“I woke up...Stevros, Devin and Jacco were still unconscious. We were all tied up and I pretended to be out cold still. I heard Elgin demanding to talk to our captors. The short ones poked him with long poles, and told him to ‘shut up’, but then three taller beings came. Odd looking, they were too. Clothing was outlandish, and their eyes had no white in them, but other ways they were like us.”

Zacary saw Governor Reslic nodding, as if this information meant something to him. A tendril of fear sent a chill through his mind. He forced himself to continue.

“The tall ones told the short ones something, and Elgin was cut free and dragged to his feet. He very nearly got free, but one of the tall ones drew a weapon and activated it at him. It turned Elgin green and he fell down. While he was down, I heard a whistle and two huge canines appeared and began to...tear him apart. Then the green went off.”

The memory almost made Zacary sick again, as it had back then. He looked up and saw the grim look on Governor Reslic’s face and it made him feel better. It wasn’t being turned on him – it was for those others.

Zacary went on, “The mutants took all our gear, our weapons, the stuff from our pockets, even our boots. They never gave us anything, no food, no water, even after we were all awake and they made us walk. They hit us if we stopped. Don’t know how far we walked. Several days and by then my feet were blistered and bleeding. My head was aching and my arms were bruised and sore.”

“What became of your companions?” Nairo asked gently.

“Jacco, fell down. Didn’t get up when they beat him,” Zacary shivered again. “Stev and Devin were still with me when we met up with Thurby’s group. She’d been beaten and...other things, I think.”

Zacary seemed to lose track of what he wanted to say.

“Where did they take you?” Nairo prompted.

“They had us penned in a clear area. Several other groups were there. They had us guarded by people in some kind of armour. Couple tried to make a run, but were shot down. We all had our arms tied behind us. Then some important type came and those with him turned some green light on us. Everyone who fell was dragged away...and they just disappeared...like they went through a wall.”

“This green light – did it affect you?” Nairo asked intently.

“No,” Zacary said at once, and then his mind recalled an oddity. “No, but all those from here fell down, but all the comms, I mean those from the towns and cities, stayed standing. Except me.”

Now Zacary was glad he was sitting, he felt shaky and pale. He was alive because he had lost his power.

“I...” he tried to speak and could no longer say the words he wanted to get out. As soon as he remembered seeing his brother with the high-ranking stranger – his tongue seemed to go rigid. He turned his mind away from that and could continue. “They made us work – digging rocks from the ground – using our hands. The mutants and those others whipped us to keep working – until we dropped. Some of the mutants dragged the women off...I heard them screaming.”

“How did you get away?” Nairo asked.

For a moment, Zacary couldn't speak again, but the vision was clear in his mind. He tried to speak...but the harder he tried, the more of his body seemed to go rigid. He didn't notice Governor Reslic moving closer, but he felt a hand rest gently on his forehead.

"I see...your brother freed you."

Zacary's mind confirmed it, but he couldn't speak it.

"He was with the alien leader...collaborating?" Reslic murmured.

"No!" Zacary's mind contested. "A prisoner." He stopped trying to speak and allowed himself to recall what he remembered. It wasn't much...just how Yuri had said, "Go, run, warn the Governors." He'd pleaded with Yuri to come too. His brother had said, "I'm a traitor. I don't dare go back."

"But why," Zacary had said.

"What it's always been – the drink – and now he owns my soul. I dare not go back and pollute everyone I touch. Go...before he does it to you."

Nairo spoke into the silence, unaware of the mental exchange. "And then you walked back here?"

"I...yes...I must have," Zacary said aloud. His mind went suddenly blank. "I don't remember."

Reslic removed his hand. He mentally calculated how long it might have taken Zacary to walk back. Perhaps he had, but how had he got all the other injuries? There were many days not accounted for.

Nairo must have been thinking along similar lines. "You must try to remember. You are the only one of the third Scout group to return. We need to know everything you can tell us."

Zacary gulped. "Only, Sir? Out of one hundred people?"

Nairo confirmed it with a nod. "Do you know how you came by your injuries?"

At the young man's confused look, Nairo repeated the findings of the doctors. Zacary shook his head. It was more as if he was trying to catch a vision that kept flicking in his peripheral vision.

"I...can't. I...don't know."

"Perhaps later," Nairo spoke gently. "Do you recall anything the mutants or aliens said?"

"Aliens? I don't think I saw any aliens."

"The dark eyed ones," Nairo clarified.

"But they looked like us. I just thought they were a less mutated sort of mutant. Though when they spoke, I didn't understand them. They gave sharp commands to the short and ugly mutants who understood what was wanted. The ugly mutants speak a dialect close to ours."

"Did they speak to you?" Nairo asked patiently.

"No, they just babbled amongst themselves. What they said didn't really make sense. It was stuff like – 'the big sphere is waken' and 'they've trans-robed the captives' or 'they have given us much in exchange for our tormentors'. Then they would laugh in a hideous way and say, 'our tormentors like us now'."

Nairo glanced at the Governors to see if either had other questions. Reslic was concentrating on Zacary, but Xyron indicated a negative with a shake of his head.

"We will let you rest, Cadet-Sergeant, and return if we have more questions," Nairo spoke formally.

He let the Governors precede him from the room and obeyed Xyron's quiet direction to accompany them. They went to a small sitting room not far from the isolation room.

"Sir?" Nairo queried.

Reslic did not sit, and directed his attention to Nairo. "Commander, I want you to direct a number of your people who are familiar with sector seventy to seventy-two to report to me. I have aerial photos taken from a cloaked stealth ship. I want your people to examine them and look for anomalies that might indicate an alien base."

Nairo nodded and Reslic gestured him away.

“How is Zacary’s prognosis?” Reslic asked.

“He is young and everything seems to be healing well. The arm will take the longest time.” Xyron summarised. “Did you get any details from him?”

“Yes. He did not have all the wounds we found when he escaped,” Reslic stated. “If he was tortured, as the wounds indicate, he may have blocked those memories. The question remains of who hurt him.”

“I do not like the idea of Yuri with the aliens. It might be how they learned about the estate. Who knows what else he might have told them. Perhaps he betrayed his brother.”

“Zacary’s memory of his brother showed he was in very poor condition too,” Reslic said. “If he betrayed his brother, I don’t think it was by his choice. Yuri has a problem handling alcohol. He pledged to keep off it, but he may have unwittingly become a traitor. What worries me is whether they discovered Zacary and Yuri are brothers and used that detail.”

“Did you sense any kind of mind control?” Xyron asked. He had a degree of telepathy, but Reslic had more.

“Not while I was sensing his mind. What I did sense was that some thoughts were blocked from me. Along with some that Zacary simply could not talk about. There was no sense of him being indoctrinated. However, I am uneasy. When asked about how he returned, his mind went completely blank, like a switch being turned off. That is not natural. Have you checked for implanted devices?”

“Yes, but I will do more tests,” Xyron said very thoughtfully. “And I have arranged for psychologist Rogert to speak to him. At least I am sure it is Zacary and not an alien in his guise. When he is well enough to be released from here, I will have Nairo assign him duties around the estate and have him watched closely.”

“That will do,” Reslic decided. “When Ty returns, he can examine Zacary. His line has the strongest affinity for the subtler manifestations of mind control.”

Chapter 36 - Revelation

High King Tymoros welcomed the peace within the Altar Room of the Sacred Temple. In there, he always felt a renewal of his strength of purpose. Alone for now, he sat on one of the benches, set into the wall of the chamber and focussed on the small lamp at the left end of the Altar, and listened. The soft voices of the Elders carried from the gathering room below. Occasionally the clear young voices of Tymos or Kryslie asked a question, and an Elder would answer. His children, born on Earth, but unquestionably his, had surprised the Elders with their innate wisdom, and fresh view of Tymorea. Yet the Elders knew what his children were destined to be, and looked beneath the façade of youth to teach and learn from, the adults they would soon be.

Before coming to the temple, Tymos and Kryslie had learnt a great deal of Tymorean history and geography. In the past three weeks, the Elders had built on that knowledge and given comparisons between the past eras of Tymorea and the present social, political, geographical and demographical situations.

Kryslie noted, as Tymoros listened, the lack of reference to the oceans of Tymorea. She knew that they were, by tradition, left alone. Elder Gabrel spoke and as he explained, ancient memories stirred.

“There is an ancient legend, of a race of very high intelligence living within the ocean. In the past thousand years, no one has seen evidence of such a race. The last mention was merely a reference in the writings of Lorno, one of the legendary Great Ones.”

In the Altar room, Tymoros was finally able to take a step back and look at his children as the Elders did. They were, indeed, more than just alien children that he had first adopted and then come to love as his own.

They had a destiny, and he dare not hold them back or his whole world would be in peril. He supposed, that even the Great One, Lorno, must have been young once.

Now, from his currently dispassionate viewpoint, he recognised how both Tymos and Kryslie had changed. It was not just that they were no longer innocent. They had experienced an attack on themselves, seen the penalty of disempowerment; they had seen death. It was also that their individual characters were becoming stronger - they were no longer strong willed and ignorant, but strong willed and determined. They were no longer children, but adults in all but age.

He thought then about Llaimos. He tried to think ahead to the stages of growth he could expect for his youngest child. Always, the images blinked from child to adult. Regret did not colour his thinking. Llaimos, back in the safety of the Royal Estate, was growing quickly. And it could only be because he had to be ready – because he was the third. Always, in times of desperate need, three Great Ones emerged.

Briefly, he admitted to himself the desire to cancel his tour, go home to the Royal Estate. Immediately, part of his mind told him must continue – that Tymos and Kryslie must experience the world outside of the Estate. He trusted this instinctive reaction – even if this meant they were exposed to danger.

He knew he needed to be able to step back further, and let them learn to act on their own. It wasn't easy, when he had lost so many children, but children had to grow and become independent.

He could not stifle them.

It did not mean that he would throw them into danger. They were still inexperienced, even with all the memories of all the Governors. After leaving the Temple, while they were on tour, the guards that went with them would not take risks. They would be even more security conscious than when they were at the Estate.

None of their number had found tracks of the young alien. He accepted that the being must have returned and reported to his superiors. Maybe it was to the leader of the group who had intruded into the palace grounds. If so, that leader would surely want to have another go at his children.

His mind moved forward to when they would be leaving the Temple. A day, two at most, the weather forecasters estimated before the last of the storms passed. The city of Dira was their first official stop. They would be safe enough there...

From the eleven captured intruders, Reslic had taken personal force screens. These had protected the intruders from the effects of the alien's green force weapon. They should do the same for Tymoreans. That was why Tymoros already wore one of the captured devices and he would have one for each of Tymos and Kryslie. The other eight would be used by some of the guards. That would be yet another protection.

Tymoros moved his thoughts to the return of young Zacary and Reslic's concern that he might be an unwitting spy for the aliens. Certainly, he must investigate the young man when he returned. Still, in the two weeks since Zacary had been allowed up and about, those observing him had reported nothing suspicious. He felt a warning shiver. Hadn't young Stenn Reslic implied that Zacary was adept at hiding his bullying actions from adults?

His thoughts were interrupted by the presence of others in the altar room.

"Father?" Kryslie spoke quietly.

Tymoros turned, smiled and beckoned to them. "Tired of lessons?" he asked as Tymos and Kryslie came and sat on either side of him.

"No," Kryslie answered truthfully. "Everything the Elders have said to us is important. They have given us a wider perspective of the world."

"And enabled us to bring together the many ideas that come unexpectedly into our minds," Tymos added. "When they speak of new things, we recall many details that we have not experienced. We guess these things come to us from the mind meld with you and the other Governors...but there are memories from far, far back. From before you or Reslic or Xyron could have been born."

"Those are memories that come to each Governor during the Ritual of Ascension. It is a gift from the Guardians of Peace - wisdom that will guide us and keep us from repeating past mistakes."

Both Tymos and Kryslie considered that answer, and then Kryslie spoke again. "We asked the Elders why it might be that we feel pressure within us when a ground tremor is building. They spoke of those in the past that had 'planet sense', and more of those very old memories surfaced. It seems that we have such a gift...or curse."

"The Elders told us that those with this sense could feel trauma done to the planet," Tymos added. "But they could also draw on the aura of this planet when they need to replenish their personal power. This we know we can do."

Tymoros nodded. "That is what the legends of the Great Ones claim. Yet, all those with Royal Power do that to a lesser extent...usually passively...except when activating the transmitters. Those units draw on the aura to charge up, but the rate of charging depends on the level of power of the user."

That statement recalled to Tymos's mind all the tech data he had read in the archives about transmitters. He needed time to sort and discard details not relevant to his sudden thought.

Kryslie caught an idea and held onto it.

"The power grid on the estate amplifies the passive draw on the aura...and the transmitters also have a booster function built in...but...Tymos and I don't need either," she said slowly. "Can you transmit when you are away from the estate?"

“Yes, and across reasonable distance. However, to go from here to the estate...no. We would have to tap a long-range beam,” Tymoros told them.

“Could we?” Kryslie asked.

Tymoros sat calmly. “I do not know.”

“The guards...they can transmit groups of people...a fair distance,” Tymos pointed out. “Could we use their devices...with the boost potential...out here?”

“Yes.”

“What about ordinary people, other royals,” Kryslie asked.

“Yes,” Tymoros answered tersely again.

“How could an ordinary royal person, actively draw on the aura?” Kryslie persisted. That was a point not mentioned anywhere in the archives.

Tymos found the answer coming into his mind. It was more of a visual image. “They would have to be able to sense the aura.”

Tymoros did not add to that answer. Instead, he queried, “Is this ability an important matter?”

Tymos twitched and turned his attention back to his father. “It was something that niggled my mind.”

Mentally, Kryslie commented to her twin, “And I think I know why I feel more alive since we left the estate.”

“Why,” Tymos asked mentally as he looked around and focussed on the multicoloured glass window behind the altar.

“The power grid that the transmitters draw on blocks us from the aura, or rather makes it harder to draw on directly. That is not the case out here. The two of us must draw on it naturally.”

Kryslie gave a brief mental word of agreement and spoke to distract their father. “We were asked to sit the vigil tonight. The Elders will be instructing us after we eat.”

The air was always calm in the Eternal Temple. Storms could rage without, winds could blow with fearful intensity, but only the faintest of breezes would be felt within, even if all the doors and windows were open.

On that night, in the altar Room, the two oil-fed lamps were giving an absolutely steady light. The night outside was completely still. Within the temple, the silence was absolute.

While the Elders and younger acolytes slept in chambers off the gathering room, Tymos and Kryslie knelt in silent meditation, with eyes closed – oblivious to the hard stone under their knees.

They both woke from their thoughts, eyes flicking open at the same instant – aware of a draught in the Altar Room. In an atavistic reaction, both felt the hairs on their necks prickle. Both stood, looked away from each other and adjusted their eyes to see more clearly in the dim light. The lamp flames were flickering wildly and from behind the Altar, where no opening existed, an aura of pale mauve was growing in intensity.

They sensed...a Presence.

“What...” Kryslie began to say, but she forgot all thought when the mauve glow became like sunlight and the altar seemed to vanish into a vista of sunshine, cloudless blue skies, green hills, trees, flowers and a stream trickling and tumbling down rocks nearby.

Then a musical voice spoke softly in their minds. “You are children of divine creation. Will you serve as our Advocates to return peace to this world? Will you serve us with your heart, your mind and your will?”

“Who are you?” Tymos asked in awe. “You have spoken to us before.”

“We are the Guardians of Peace. We are part of you and you were created to serve us.”

“And Llaimos?” Kryslie asked.

“He is the third. Three are needed to open this portal to Dirakee.”

An intense sensation of peace filled Tymos and Kryslie. It lasted only a moment, but long enough for them to want to share the feeling with all their people.

“You have so much power,” Kryslie thought. “Surely you do not need us? We are but mortal humans.”

“Child, we cannot act directly, and we cannot be in all places at once. We need you, but you may always call on us and we will be with you. It is through you, our desire for peace will be done.”

Without needing to confirm the decision with each other, both Tymos and Kryslie spoke the words of the promise together. “We pledge to serve you with heart, mind and will.”

Into their minds came the full knowledge of what they were to be. They saw flashing images of the future that was to come, with scenes of devastation momentarily obscuring the peaceful scene that was Dirakee.

Yet this threat did not frighten them. They had the promise that peace would return to their world. They had the power to act and would know what to do...if they stayed open to the wisdom of the Guardians. They understood that their elders were already preparing, for the future. Preparing to keep the people safe, hunting down the alien saboteurs. Tymos and Kryslie saw that those aliens were not the real enemy. They too were victims, though still dangerous to the peace of Tymorea.

They filled their mind with the picture of Dirakee, the legendary fortress of the Tymorean people. The portal closed slowly; the light faded out. They knew that the portal would open again for them, at need.

One final scripture came into their mind. “Those that can open the gates - cannot enter.”

The dimness returned to the Altar Room, as Tymos and Kryslie came to terms with what they had seen and heard.

They had experienced the will of the Guardians of Peace.

Chapter 37 - Royal Tour

The Season of the New Sun had begun. Within two days, the zekon had thawed as the sun burnt off the covering of clouds. The trees and plants growing around the ancient temple sprouted new leaves and new grass had begun to form a film of green over the soil.

Tymos and Kryslie, who had been quiet and thoughtful since their night vigil, felt the vibrancy of the new life fill them when they walked out of the Temple. Overshadowing the sense of new life were the memories of the scenes of devastation. They had shared some of their vigil experience with the Elders, and those wise and brilliant men and women would consider the warning inherent in the described scenes.

Some of the Elders had already foreseen the war that would come. From those earlier visions, plans and protections were developed and these were already being implemented. These new visions, coming directly from the Guardians of Peace, revealed the full scope of the future.

Standing at the top of the Temple's front steps, looking down over the burgeoning garden, seeing the potential for new life, both Tymos and Kryslie felt the memories of desolation recede. They could not shake the vision, even though the Elders had explained that what they had seen was not an absolute, inescapable future. The Guardians had sent the images as a warning of what might happen if they did not prepare, and to ease their concern, the full details of the defence plans were revealed to them. At that time, neither of them had seen a weakness. All that could be done, was being done by the relevantly trained people. Still, they felt that they were meant to be doing something more.

Elder Tymori had advised, "Stay open to the wisdom of the Guardians. Keep learning about Tymorea; keep experiencing aspects still new to you."

Kryslie met her brother's eyes as they removed the simple sandals they had used in the temple. With a quick glance, Tymos drew her attention to the city of Dira, spread out like a three-D map to the east of the temple hill. It was lit by the rising sun, and even so early, their eyes could see people moving along the streets. She suddenly felt that was where she needed to be. They had learnt so much history during their three weeks with the Elders, now they needed to learn about the common people, who depended on the Royals for protection.

She felt the urge to run down the hill, barefoot as she was, to begin their future role. She felt her twin's mental sigh, and his passing thought of how juvenile such an action would look. With a sigh of her own, she picked up her pack, and followed after her father and the six Elders who were also heading for Dira.

At the outer boundary of the extensive Temple gardens, the guards and servants who had spent the season of Storms in the city, waited to accompany them back along the kilometre of road to the city.

Tymos and Kryslie were delighted to see their friends Jonko and Keleb with the group, and put aside their more serious musings. Summarising their time in the temple as being enlightening, they asked about their younger brother and how he was progressing.

After assuring them that Llaimos was fine and that Stenn had nominated himself Llaimos's mentor, Jonko mentioned the return of Zacary.

"He was badly treated, but is recovering," Keleb added after Jonko's recital of known facts. "However, I can't really get to like him. Stenn flat out doesn't trust him, but he admits that was from before. He hasn't anything new to say against him."

"Trauma can change people," Tymos suggested. "I'll see what I think when we get back."

"Good idea," Keleb agreed, but Jonko said, "We should give him a chance."

What Kryslie was going to say was interrupted by Tymorous, who had finished listening to his attendant.

“When we reach Dira, we will need to prepare for the first of our official engagements,” Tymoros advised. “Your attendants have your formal robes. You will be being presented to the City councillors, important merchants and some of the leading artisans. After the initial formalities, I will have you with me at the meetings arranged to discuss matters of importance. This will give you an understanding of the role of the Governors, mine, especially.”

He went on to explain what he expected of them, and when he was finished, Tymos and Kryslie had too little time to continue their conversation with their friends.

It was not until the late afternoon of their third day in the city that they had time to exchange more news with their friends. They met in the private courtyard of the manor house vacated for the use of the High King and his entourage.

Keleb scrutinised Kryslie as she sat on a low ornamental garden wall. “You seem older,” he commented.

“Maybe I am,” Kryslie decided as she thought on the past weeks. “I have learnt so much.” She allowed her own senses to study her friend. “You have changed too.”

“I feel...different...and the same,” Keleb admitted, trying to describe the subtle change within himself. “Perhaps it is more accurate to say that my priorities have changed. Is it true that you and Tymos wanted Jon and I to join you?”

“Yes, we thought you needed to experience the wider world too,” Kryslie did not mention the subtle differences she had felt after leaving the Royal Estate. She wondered if her friends had sensed them too.

“Then I must thank you. It has given me the chance to explore my affinity to animals. Until now, I had only been near the carriage horses. They are noble creatures, strong, confident, trained and used to us weak humans.”

Kryslie smiled, realising that she had sensed something similar from the creatures, but her mind had too many other things to dwell on.

“We came here by the beam,” Keleb explained. “But on calmer days during the past week, we rode out into the country. Jonko too, and some of the attendants of course. Eonic, a cousin of Governor Xyron, came with us and taught us a lot about the botany and biology of this area. Jonko already knew a lot about the plants, but when we stopped for him to discuss some aspect of botany or cultivation with Eonic, I found the wild creatures coming up to me. They weren’t afraid and it was almost as if they thought I was one of them. I felt that I could almost understand their thoughts and emotions, which are simple thoughts compared to our own.”

Kryslie placed her hand on Keleb’s arm, keeping his attention. “You have a special gift, and you need to cherish it and learn to use it. I am glad you have that chance.”

Keleb nodded. “Kryslie, you know how I never wanted to be a warrior like Jon,” he suddenly blurted. “I now know that I have reason to want to fight. I asked Jon to coach me since we have been here. Do you know why?”

“Yes,” Kryslie told him. “I too will fight with everything I have to protect this world. It is going to come to that. Tymos and I are beginning to see what we are, and we will need both you with your affinity to animals and Jonko’s knowledge of plants. You two are our interpreters of changes to the natural aura, and will fight at our side.”

Tymos and Jonko emerged from the house in time to hear Kryslie’s comment. It had the force of a prophecy.

“We will all fight together,” Tymos confirmed.

“What use is a sword to a plant?” Jonko asked softly.

“A plough share is another kind of blade,” Tymos said. “And there is more than one way to fight a battle.”

“How do you mean?” Jonko asked.

“Kryslie and I have discovered that we can draw on the aura, call it an energy field if you like, to enhance our abilities. We couldn’t do it back on the estate, because the power grid blocks us. We think you will be able to do that too. We agree that it can’t be a coincidence that you, an extremely capable fighter, have an affinity for growing things. Clear your mind and I will show you something.”

Jonko obeyed, and into his mind came an odd glowing picture. It was like a three dimensional representation on a computer screen. He heard Tymos say, “Look around, and watch when I draw on the aura.”

The lines of the glowing imaged moved closer to Tymos, but most noticeable was the brightening glow around Tymos’s feet, and the new fine lines flowing like spider threads towards Tymos from the trees and plants.

“Oh, my...” Jonko said, awed. The he blinked and his eyes returned to seeing only the physical world.

“Krys and I can see the lines of power that are the natural aura and they are as bright as the sun on still water. Not all of the lines affect the plants, but the life of the plants is linked to it. And in time, Jon, you will be able to manipulate the aura and affect the plants,” Tymos insisted.

Jonko chose not to express his disbelief. Keleb was looking curiously at his friend’s awed expression.

“What happened?” Keleb asked.

“I showed him the energy form of the plants and ground,” Tymos said aloud, but added mentally to Kryslie, “You might be able to show him the energy shape of the animals. He is not so receptive to me, but you have more empathy.”

Kryslie nodded faintly and offered, “Kel, come with me to the stables, I will try to show you something.”

Keleb looked confused for a moment, but then agreed. “Okay.”

At the stables, Kryslie took Keleb’s hand, as touching made mental contact easier. “Animals and people have their own energy shape. Clear your mind...”

Kryslie knew when Keleb began to see what she saw with her mind rather than her eyes.

“It is like a glowing after image of a bright light, but within that glow there are lines of greater intensity,” Keleb said. The image faded. “Can I do that? See those lines?”

“Now you know what there is to see, concentrate on the creature and imagine the aura filling it. It may take you a little while to learn how to draw on the aura, but keep trying and practicing.”

Kryslie watched the concentration on Keleb’s face.

“I can’t do it,” he said, discouraged.

“You are trying too hard. Did you know that when you use your transmitter, you are drawing on the aura to charge it?”

“Huh?” Keleb blurted. “What do you mean?”

“What I said. The only difference is that there is no power grid out here like there is at the palace. The grid there is like a storage battery, and you tap into that...it makes it easier for those with less power. Most people there find it harder to draw on the aura directly.”

“But...”

“Okay, to focus, try holding your transmitter and trying to see the power shape,” Kryslie suggested.

Keleb followed her directions, looking down at his transmitter until it charged and then looked at the horse.

“How did I ...”

Kryslie grinned. “Tymos and I did a bit of digging in the archives. The transmitter units act as a booster and a focus for a natural ability.”

“But...we can’t use transmitters out here.”

“You can, Father confirmed it. On the estate, they restrict our units to stop students going off the estate. Plus they have added a protective shield around the place. Anyway, you can transmit out here, if the unit is charged. In fact, Tymos and I can sense the aura more strongly out here than on the estate.”

“I will take your word on that,” Keleb said, finding a grin. “If you are free tomorrow, why don’t you ride out with us and look around? Maybe we can practice transmitting with no one looking.”

“I would like that,” Kryslie admitted. She passed the idea to her brother mentally, and received back an image of four riders surrounded by a retinue of guards. She sighed to herself and saw his wry grin.

The Royal Tour progressed; travelling by coach along a curving, sometimes zigzag route stopping for a day or two at various towns and smaller villages between Dira and Reva.

At the smaller centres of population, Tymos mingled with the lower class commoners for the first time. Not that they hadn’t met commoners before, but the ones invited to the events at the palace were usually the higher ranked ones, like City Councillors and wealthy merchants and their families. Now they met farmers, tradespeople, herdsmen, bakers, and even children.

Tymoros had engagements that kept him busy, but when Tymos and Kryslie were not required, he gave them permission to mingle with the people. They were usually instantly recognised by their formal attire and their dark red hair, which was a characteristic of the High King’s line, as well as by the contingent of guards around them.

Jonko and Keleb were able to move with greater freedom, and they spoke to the local people and later brought some of them to talk to Tymos and Kryslie. All had strange and disturbing stories to tell and it became clear that the aliens were getting bolder, and actually approaching and infiltrating the centres of population. They believed they were unsuspected, but they were betraying their actions to the observant locals. The aliens were looking at everything and getting everywhere.

A similar picture reached them in each town and village, and the stories were becoming disturbing in their frequency. Dutifully, Tymos passed the knowledge on to Tymoros, who in turn relayed it to Reslic. It was now obvious that the aliens were present in greater numbers than anyone had realised.

During a quiet moment alone together, Tymos shared with Kryslie the stirrings of a premonition. “The aliens must surely be intending to act soon. They have not dared to come near us, knowing we can identify them.”

“They fear us,” Kryslie decided. “We almost overcame the leader of the intruders, when we were merely children.”

“Yes, that one knows who we are,” Tymos agreed. “I do not think he wants us to remain free. Surely, he knows we are travelling away from the estate. He will have to act before we reach the Farmlands City.”

“I want to know more about those aliens,” Kryslie said.

“They are not the ones we must fight,” Tymos reminded her.

“But they might lead us to those who are our target,” Kryslie suggested. “The first need in any war is for information. The aliens are learning about Tymoreans, we must learn about them.”

“They are not discovering everything,” Tymos corrected. “But I agree. We must be prepared.”

As the Royal tour approached Reva, the amount of foot and cart traffic on the road grew thicker.

“Father, where is everyone going?” Kryslie asked as their carriage passed carts that had pulled off the road to let them pass.

“Judging by the laden carts, I would say these are farmers coming into the city to sell some excess produce while they are here to answer the census.”

Instead of asking what a census was, Tymos and Kryslie sorted through the information coming into their minds from either memory, or bequeathed knowledge.

“I remember now,” Kryslie thought at her twin, with a heavy touch of irony.

Tymos thought back, “Now that they are not making us forget.” Aloud, he said carefully, “I hope our accommodation was booked.” He was grinning as he said it.

He looked at Tymoros as he said it and saw an answering smile.

“Oh, I think I have rank enough to be sure of a bed,” he responded to the teasing. “I am not sure about lower ranked Royals such as mere Princes.”

Kryslie realised something and shared it with Tymos. “He liked you teasing him! I think it has been a very long time since anyone dared.”

Reva was still two days ride away, but the senior guard spoke to Tymoros when they stopped for the lunch break.

“Sire, with all these people on the road, should we stop and camp as we have been? I do not feel comfortable with having so many unknown people around.”

“Do you think we are too lofty to share the conditions these commonfolk must endure?” Tymoros asked mildly, as he stood next to the carriage.

“No Sire. It is not that. Your loyal subjects, such as my colleagues, and myself have been enjoined to ensure the safety of yourself and your heirs. Your other loyal subjects, which include most of the commonfolk sharing this road, are not our fear. It is the non-loyal subjects or others that concern me.”

Tymoros understood the distinction. “What do you propose?”

His children lost interest in the domestic arrangements when Tymos spotted a familiar face amongst the farm folk and villagers trudging along the road.

“Krys. That looks like one of the children we met,” he nudged his sister.

“Where?” She looked in the direction he was pointing.

“Gone!” Tymos muttered. “He spotted the coaches and wriggled back into the crowd.”

The crowd of walkers had slowed to gawk at the Royal carriages, but did not venture past the ring of watching guards.

“I’d go and try to find them if we hadn’t been told to stay here,” Tymos said. “I still would, except I agree with father’s reasons.”

“So do I,” Krys agreed. “Even though we can’t be sure we haven’t already been spotted by an alien observer. After all, we are hardly inconspicuous and we have managed to stroll around every town we have stopped at. What about Jon and Kel – they could look for us.”

“No, they haven’t met them,” Tymos sighed.

“Well, we know they are heading to Reva. Once we get there we can get Jon and Kel to look, or we can once our official appointments are over,” Kryslie considered, then she asked, “Is there a reason why you are so interested? Tarri, maybe?”

Tymos gave her a disgusted look. “Tarri, yes, but not for the reason you are implying. I would like to know if her mother got better.”

“Fair enough, but she is a nice sensible girl. She would make a good consort,” Kryslie continued to tease.

The reply was an un-gentlemanly snort. “I have seen enough of boring official functions and meetings on this short trip to last a lifetime. I will happily step aside and let Llaimos become High King after father, may he live for a long time yet.”

Morin and Delia approached the coach, accompanied by two guards.

“The privacy tent is set up if you need to use it,” Delia said primly.

“And a tent for you to eat in,” Morin added.

“Good,” Tymos announced. “I need to stretch my legs. I have not done so much sitting still that I can remember.”

“I am sure His Excellency will check you haven’t gone soft, as soon as you return, Prince Tymos,” Morin assured his charge with a perfectly respectful voice.

Tymos groaned. “Maybe I won’t go back.”

Delia, knowing Tymos was jesting, did not add a comment.

That night, they travelled late and detoured off the road to the farmstead of a former Peace Corps man. During the meal provided by the travelling party, Tymos and Kryslie listened to more reports of disturbing incidents. The man had his own informants out amongst the local farmers. Their inner certainty that the aliens would act soon, intensified. Just as they knew, with the certainty equal of a direct vision from the guardians, that the alien they encountered – wanted them. And these aliens were responsible for the deaths of their father’s other children. Why, they did not know.

Both Tymos and Kryslie did not intend to let the alien get them easily. If he did succeed in taking them, they wanted him to underestimate them, and they would escape. They would take with them knowledge about the aliens.

The following day, they left early, travelled into the night, and kept travelling until they reached Reva, where they were the guests of the mayor of the city. Fortunately, he lived in a walled off manor and the crowds of excited commoners only had a quick view of the carriages.

The city was full of visitors from the surrounding towns, and had been ever since the census was announced. People from the closer towns and villages came first, completed their information and departed. They were replaced by people coming from more distant places.

However, since the arrival of the High King, the people were staying in the hope of seeing the king and his heirs. They might never have another chance.

Two full days of official duties followed by formal dinners and arranged entertainments was more than enough for Tymos and Kryslie. Tymos excused them from the third day’s agenda, giving them tacit permission to mingle inconspicuously amongst the common people.

During the first two days, they had worn their formal outfits, sometimes gold and silver, other times the red or purple and gold. At each formal appearance, they wore the simple coronets of Heir Designates and were always just out of reach of the common people. For their excursion on the third day, they reverted to their simpler brown travelling robes, and wore hooded capes of similar design to the ordinary folk, to hide the startling dark auburn of their hair. Their guards and attendants wore similar over-capes to hide their formal livery. Jonko and Keleb already blended into the crowds for their hair was light brown like the commoners, and they did not need to dress formally.

For that day, while they waited for Jonko and Keleb to bring the first of their contacts to speak with them, Tymos and Kryslie sat on a bench near the bakery and dairy stalls and listened to snatches of conversation as people moved around them. The subjects ranged from farmers talking about planting, herders discussing herd increases, city folk complaining of the crowds, children shouting in excitement because of the presence of the king, and being told off for racing between the legs of adults, and various snatches of gossip about people they had no knowledge of.

If they lowered their hoods, they would be an instant sensation, but that was not their intention. The people Jonko brought to meet them had important things to say, that needed to reach the ears of the Governors. Having a crowd of excited people all trying to talk to them, just to say that they had, was counter-productive.

The bench was near the centre of town, just down from the main square, but still in the midst of people. Word quickly spread that the king would be walking through the square to talk to anyone that had a need to speak to him. The crowds began to surge towards the far side of

the square. Tymos and Kryslie had spoken to the last of the visitors Jonko had brought to them, and were considering going back to the mayor's manor when Kryslie spotted Tarri again. She was walking towards the bakery, with an older woman on her arm, but trying to see who was exciting the crowd. She nudged Tymos and shrugged in the girl's direction.

"I'll bring them over," Tymos said softly. He told their guards to stay where they were. He moved with a swordsman's grace to avoid people passing in front of him, and not looking where they were going, and neared Tarri just as a man shoving past jostled the older woman off her feet. With effortless ease, he prevented the woman from falling, and sensed that she had twisted her ankle.

The old woman turned to thank him, but saw little more than the hooded face. Tarri, however, had seen the intense blue eyes and a glimpse of auburn hair. Her mouth opened in astonishment and closed again. She had enough sense to stay quiet, lest the crowd made her their focus.

Tymos met her eyes and grinned at her. "There is a seat not far away if your mother would like to rest her foot," he suggested politely. "At the moment, everyone is trying to occupy the far side of the square."

"My mother came out to see the High King Governor," Tarri spoke softly. "But as you say, the crowd is too dense."

As Tymos gently helped the woman to hobble along, he felt his own energy going into her. He did not understand it, but he hoped it would help her ankle to heal.

After helping the woman onto the bench and sending Delia for some refreshments, Tymos murmured, "Do you recall my sister, Kryslie?"

Tarri nodded, but her mother proved that she was not feeble minded. "Princess Kryslie? And you, young man, must be Prince Tymos. But what are you doing, wandering around on your own?"

Tymos chuckled. "Avoiding the crowds. We had enough of that yesterday. This way, we can talk to nice people, and find out their concerns. And, we are not exactly alone."

The woman finally noticed Morin and the guards.

"We had the pleasure of meeting your children a few weeks ago. I heard then that you were ill. I am glad you have recovered."

Tarri looked at him with a sheen of tears in her eyes. "You made her better, Pr..."

Tymos silenced her with a gesture and insisted, "Tymos."

"Pr...Tymos," she went on. "I don't know how, but after I went home she started to recover. The doctor called it miraculous, because so many others died, and many more are even now, still weak and frail. It had to be you. After talking to you, I just knew she would get well."

"I...am glad," Tymos managed to say.

Kryslie saw Jonko approaching. She spoke quickly, "We are aware of the illnesses, and would like to hear more about yours. Delia, would you arrange for ..."

"Leonie," Tarri supplied.

"Leonie and her children to dine with us this evening?" Kryslie finished.

"But we don't have anything to wear," Tarri protested.

"No one will think less of you for that," Tymos promised. "We don't have any official engagements tonight. It will just be father, a few of the Elders and us. And please, we would like you to come."

"We would be honoured," Tarri managed to say politely. "I never guessed who you were when we met you."

Kryslie met Jonko's gaze and sensed he had an important message. Seeing Aldiv following him, she guessed they were being summoned, and she flicked a mental warning at her brother.

"Will you require assistance returning to your lodgings, Mistress Leonie?" Tymos enquired.

"Help? Oh no!" Leonie smiled. "This surprise has made me feel ten years younger."

Tymos helped her up, and hid a frown of confusion. Now, he sensed that the woman was almost well and her ankle was again perfectly sound. Leonie patted his arm. "Thank you young man, I'll be fine, and I think you are wanted elsewhere."

"We will send an escort for you this evening," Tymos promised. "And my friend Jonko will walk with you for now, so we know where to send the escort."

Aldiv spoke as soon as the women moved away. "You are to return to the manor house. An urgent matter has come up. We must prepare to leave for Losk right after dinner."

Kryslie stood up and noticed that the crowd in the square was dispersing. As much as she wanted to know the nature of the urgent summons, she refrained from questioning Aldiv in such a public place.

Tymos moved off after his sister, but his mind was on the meeting with Tarri's mother, and the odd sensations he had felt. Kryslie subtly guided his direction with gentle nudges, and sent out the idea of, "We are no one of interest." She waited for her brother to finish his cogitations. Finally, he thought at her, "I healed that woman, Krys. When she was shoved, she twisted her ankle. It was painful; I sensed it. And she was frail. But just then, when I helped her up again, I sensed none of that."

"So, what is the problem?" Kryslie thought at him.

"No problem, but I didn't think I was doing anything," Tymos explained.

"Bro, think about it. I know you sensed energy going to Leonie. It's obvious. You have a healing gift too."

"But..."

"You sensed the energy drain and you were hoping she would get better..." Kryslie nudged his thinking.

"But, you can't do that, and I can't do what you did to help Sacul."

"So? We are twins, and there is no reason why we can't both have healing gifts. And yes, I know, minds and bodies are different, but in case you haven't noticed, and as close as we are, we are not exactly clones."

Tymos suddenly grinned broadly, and he hadn't quite sobered when he said aloud, "But I can't go and help all the sick people."

"No, but if we can find out what we can from Leonie, and get reports from the local medics, maybe your observations added to that might suggest a solution," Kryslie suggested. "Why else do you think I invited them?"

"You wanted to," Tymos reminded her.

"That too," Kryslie agreed. "But if they help us find a cure, they deserve to be special. Because it means that we are beginning to fight back."

That night, Tymos and Kryslie entertained their guests as if they too were Royalty. Tymoros soon encouraged the family to lose their awe of him, and while Kryslie, Jonko and Keleb entertained the other children, Tymos and the King listened to Leonie and Tarri telling what they knew of the illness and its effects.

When the family left to return to their lodgings, Tymoros spoke via the communicator to the palace medics, giving them ideas on how to cure the ill and rehabilitate the survivors.

Only after Tymoros ended the communication, did Tymos ask about the urgent matter that had come up.

Tymoros was thoughtful for a moment, and then said, "We must detour to Losk. A criminal matter concerning the elite hierarchy of demi-nobles. Several of the ruling councillors are accused of abetting the aliens and other criminal offences."

"Father, if the matter is so urgent, can we not go by long range beam from here to Losk?" Tymos asked.

Grimly, Tymoros explained. “The crimes were committed in Losvale, a town several days ride from the city. If we went by beam, we would still need transportation. We could transport the carriage that way, but the horses do not tolerate the beam. The horses trained for the carriage are a special breed, sturdier than others are. However, you need not be concerned. I have been in communication with the palace. My brother will be arriving there tonight and will act for me until I get there.”

“What will you need us to do?” Kryslie asked.

“Nothing yet,” Tymoros said thoughtfully. We won’t have any official receptions organised. Perhaps you and your friends will continue to speak to the lesser commoners. So far the results have been useful.”

Tymos grinned. It would be like a holiday.

Chapter 38 - Power Revealed

The Royal party was still half a day's journey from the Farmland City. They had camped the previous night on a hill with a clear view down towards their destination. They should have decamped hours before, but the reason that they had not, was clearly visible.

On rising that morning, the travelling group had felt the unstable air. It felt like a building storm, but the season for the storms had passed and the weather pattern as seen from one of the orbiting weather satellites, precluded the formation of an isolated storm that stayed in one place.

Tymos and Kryslie stood staring at the city and the thick black clouds hovering above it. They felt the tension in the air, as if some force was holding the storm. Jonko and Keleb had watched with them for a time and then went off to study the local creatures and plants.

After sending a further report to the palace, Tymoros came to stand beside his children. He wondered what they were sensing and what they were thinking.

Nothing about that storm was natural. Not only was it out of season, and stationary, the air was unstable and dry, and the thick black clouds would not bring rain. He had felt it begin to build in the early hours of the morning, and knew then it was not natural, but the expression of an alien will.

Considering the intensity of his children's attention, he knew they were cognizant with the facts, without needing technological reports to confirm them. They seemed to be waiting for something.

Tymoros felt the hairs on his neck prickle him, and down below, brilliant lightning zigzagged from cloud to cloud and then to the ground. Another flash, and then another. The lightning increased in frequency, striking the ground in a ring around the city and starting fires that grew rapidly into an orange blaze circling the city. It fed on unnaturally dry vegetation, grasses and low bushes, trees and fallen branches. Thunder rumbled continuously, like a barrage of gunfire.

Neither Tymos nor Kryslie moved, nor changed their set expression. Tymoros found his face taking a grimmer expression. There was nothing he could do, except send some of the guards down to help fight the fire.

"No, Father, they need to stay here," Tymos said aloud, not realising he had read his father's thoughts. "The townsfolk are coming out to fight the fires. We should not go there for there are alien influences at work."

"I am aware of them," Tymoros agreed. "It is why I did not progress towards the storm."

Kryslie noted, "Has it occurred to you father, that if we had not been delayed by that matter in Losk, we would now be within the Farmlands City and circled by fire? Or if we had kept to our revised schedule, the same would be true?"

"It had," Tymoros confirmed. "Neither our original itinerary, nor the revised times were a highly classified secret."

"There is someone coming," Tymos announced abruptly. He was pointing to a tiny speck in the distance, moving along the road, and his eyes were adjusted to see that far.

Tymoros looked in the indicated direction and adjusted his own eyes. The rider was punishing his beast to get maximum speed.

Tymos commented. "His message must be urgent. Perhaps the Chancellor does not know exactly where we are, or even if he did he would not risk anyone transmitting near this storm."

"Aldiv," Tymoros summoned his chief attendant. The man came to his master's side and bowed slightly.

"There is a rider coming this way, along the road from the city – can you see him?"

By normal sight, the rider's position was only visible by the dry dust kicked up by the animal. It hung in the still air.

“I see him, Sire,” Aldiv confirmed. “The worst of the storm is behind him. I can bring him here.”

Without delay, Aldiv transmitted, arriving at a point a short distance in front of the rider. Moments later, man and beast arrived next to Tymoros. A man in Peace Corps uniform dismounted from the bulging-eyed and terrified horse. Keleb wordlessly took the reins from the rider, and walked the unnerved creature away from the people, talking softly to it and allowing it to calm down.

“Your Majesty, I bear greetings from...” the rider began to say. He had to shout to be heard over the thunder.

“The message please,” Tymoros directed, allowing the messenger to skip the traditional politenesses.

“Sire, there is danger in the city,” the messenger blurted. “The Chancellor warns against entering.”

“I am aware of the fires. Was there more?” Tymoros urged.

“Yes, Sire. We have been seeing many dark-eyed ones amongst the people arriving for the census. At first we did not realise what they were, it was when we were checking the information that we began to see the information was false. More came in this morning from the east, but when the Elders and census takers challenged them, this group fled to the west. After that, the fires began.”

“And you do not believe that all the aliens left,” Tymoros requested clarification.

“No, Sire. We do not.”

Tymos and Kryslie were aware of the messengers report, but they were watching the fire, and saw it acting like it was remotely controlled.

“Foul beasts,” Tymos murmured. Kryslie heard his thoughts more than his words. “It seems that they want to burn the whole city to get at us. And even the walls are burning as if they poured some fuel on them.”

“Not only that,” Kryslie observed. “Whoever is controlling that storm is drawing moisture from the air, and from the ground and the plants. They are holding the moisture in the clouds, but if they release it the flash flood will be as terrifying as the fires.”

Behind them, the messenger was offering, “Sire, I know all the roads around the city, and all the trails between the city and the hills.”

“We will stay here,” Tymoros decided. “I do not think it any wiser to go around the city. To the east are the mountains and the aliens came from that direction. To the west, is where some fled. Nor is it wise to transmit past the city, when such a storm is looming. And of course, entering now is not an option.”

At a gesture from Tymoros, Aldiv approached again.

“When you have seen to this man’s comfort, send a message to Governor Reslic. I want a long-range beam tuned to this location. When the storm abates, I will send a signal to the palace to activate it.”

“If the storm abates,” Kryslie murmured to her twin. “I cannot locate the controlling machine, can you?”

She felt as much as heard his negative. “What are they waiting for?”

“Perhaps for confirmation of our arrival,” Tymos considered aloud. “They must realise that we were delayed, and they may not know our amended arrival time, only that it will be today.”

“We might be sitting birds here, if they learn our position and can move the focus of that storm,” Kryslie said, her words clear in a lull in the thunder.

One of the circle of guards suddenly trotted to the nearest carriage. After a few moments rummaging, he sent a whistle signal. It was in the cadence for the recall for the scouts. Five minutes later, a purple glow covered the area of the camp like a dome.

Kryslie briefly glanced skyward, and then turned her attention back to the city. Jonko and Keleb drew closer to the watchers, and joined the vigil. Where they stood was still in bright sunshine.

Finally, Jonko said in a tight voice, "I can feel the life being sucked from the plants, even here."

"And the animals," Keleb added, his voice also strained. "The horse is still terrified, and I can feel the panic of smaller creatures who cannot understand what is happening. They are fleeing into the fires, for that is less terrifying than what ever is sucking the life from them."

"Can't we do something?" Keleb asked desperately, he was sensing many deaths.

"And the energies are so tangled that nothing will survive this," Jonko predicted.

Kryslie adjusted her eyes again, as Tymos turned to their father.

"Father, are we powerless to help?" Tymos asked. "Creatures and people are dying."

The lightning began to increase in frequency again, and the rumbling resumed.

Tymoros spoke carefully "Are you?"

His voice was neutral, but he had the sense of something momentous about to happen.

That simple question may have been a trigger. The air under the shield became charged, and then a brilliant arc of lightning ranged overhead, brighter than the suns light, brighter than the flashes from the storm below.

Two pairs of eyes retained an image of a vision; all others only saw the after glare.

"You have the power." Tymos and Kryslie heard the voice within the deafening crack of thunder.

They understood. The Guardians of Peace had spoken.

In an instinctive gesture of obedience, Tymos and Kryslie raised their arms high and wide and then slowly lowered them. Knowledge flowed into their mind, and for a time they forgot the people around them. Mental voices and images flicked between two minds, as they acted as one.

"Trace the lines of energy," Tymos directed. He watched as Kryslie continued to identify individual lines and begin to get a general sense of direction.

"Yes, to the west, energy is being drawn in...there! And it is flowing out again in tangled tendrils."

"Hold the cloud, Kryslie, while I sever the lines going in."

To the watchers, nothing seemed to be changing. They could only see Tymos and Kryslie, with hands now stretched out in front of them as if they were manipulating some complex set of objects.

Jonko began to glance between his friends and the town, and finally studied the energies he had learnt to see. "Yes," he murmured.

"What," Keleb had to move his mouth nearer Jonko to ask.

"They're brilliant," Jonko shouted back. "I don't know how, but they are removing lines of energy going into the storm. Lines coming from further west, for sure, and I think from sources in the city. I don't think the bastards realise it yet, because they are also holding the clouds."

A chill breeze began to blow from the direction of the city, and the black clouds began to spread out. The watchers on the hill saw the clouds come and obscure the sun, and the camp area was now in deep shadow.

Suddenly, Keleb laughed. "Whoever is down there has just realised that he has lost control – he is just about evacuating himself, because he can't leave."

A powerful bolt of lightning struck the ground to the west of the city. Something ignited and flared up into the sky like a volcano erupting. The breeze strengthened to gale force, making it hard to stand.

On the hill, servants sought shelter, though the guards could not.

Tymoros stood with his children who seemed unaware of the way their capes flapped out behind them. Jonko and Keleb, feeling the wind trying to push them away, refused to let it.

“Now!” Tymos spoke aloud.

Kryslie eased control of the power in the cloud, and the cloud mass spread out further and further, changing from deep black, to dark grey. The lightning flickered still and the thunder rumbled, making the ground shake. Huge, heavy drops of rain began to fall, and quickly became a torrent. The glare of the fires around the city abated as the rain quenched them. Gradually, Kryslie released control of the clouds, and as they spread further, the rain grew gentler as the moisture and energy returned to the ground.

Tymos and Kryslie dropped their hands, and felt the tension inside them relax. Nature was reasserting itself. The rain pouring down on them was like a benediction from the Guardians. They once again raised their arms in thanks.

Neither Tymos nor Kryslie needed to think at the other. All they could think was, “wow,” as they each came to terms with the power they had just wielded. How they had worked seamlessly together to triumph over the alien’s evil machine and its effect.

They turned finally, finding the servants and guards staring at them in awe, and instinctively bowing in respect at what they had witnessed.

Tymoros too, was impressed and awed. However, he sensed that his children were overwhelmed by the silent accolade. He spoke to distract them. “Am I correct in thinking that the device being used to warp the weather was destroyed?”

Tymos merely nodded. Kryslie explained, neutrally, “The charge grounded there.”

“And the operators?” Tymoros asked.

“Had a few minutes warning,” Tymos said flatly. “I don’t think they chose to flee - either from fear of their superior or an inability to comprehend that their machine failed them.”

“Are you able to explain what you did?” the single Elder that had remained with the group, asked.

Kryslie shook her head, flinging water from her drenched hair. “Not exactly,” she said. “We attracted to ourselves, the lines of energy the alien machine was manipulating. We were able to take control of that storm, so when it broke, it did not cause a flash flood.”

Tymoros gestured for no more questions. “I think we need to erect some shelter and try to get dry.”

The audience began to disperse and Tymoros asked his children, “How are you feeling?”

“Getting energy back,” Tymos said, lifting his head so the rain washed his face.

“Good. We will be leaving from here to return to the estate,” Tymoros told them.

With a glance at Kryslie, Tymos sighed and turned to where the single standing tent stood. Both still felt the euphoria of success and the thrill of the power they had used. It felt like they floated.

Chapter 39 - Kidnapped

The terminus of the long-range beam appeared as a glowing purple circle that revealed a faint outline of the transmitter grid at the palace. With the end of the storm and the cessation of the rain, it was now safe to travel past the city. The beam was powerful enough for groups of people, so Tymos, Kryslie, their attendants and two security personnel were to be the first to return to the Estate. When everyone used their personal transmitters to tap the beam, the attendants and security men disappeared, but Tymos and Kryslie remained.

"Tymos, try your transmitter again," Kryslie suggested.

Tymos tried again, unsuccessfully. The security men and attendants returned. Tymoros looked sternly at his children, but his look relented as he sensed their sincere bewilderment. He approached them, adjusted the setting of his own transmitter and attempted to take them home. He materialized for a moment on the transmitter grid, and seeing he was alone, returned.

"It is not our intention to be difficult, Father," Tymos said seriously. He did not want to return yet, but he had not even thought of trying to remain.

"Is it possible for our subconscious to prevent us from transmitting?" Kryslie asked. "Or there is still lingering interference from the storm?"

"Yes, to the first question," Tymoros admitted with no explanation. "No for the second, my transmitter is not affected."

"I cannot think of any reason not to return," Tymos spoke back. "Krys?"

"Nor I," Kryslie agreed. Yet she flicked a thought at her twin. "Must we encounter the aliens again?" She went on in verbal speech. "Something held us here. Father, will we all have to continue home by carriage?"

"It seems that we have no choice," Tymoros decided. "We will camp here again tonight. Aldiv, send a message back to the Estate to advise Governor Reslic of our change of plan."

Tymos and Kryslie slipped away from their father and joined Jonko and Keleb.

"What happened," Keleb asked. "Why are we now going to stay here?"

Tymos simply shook his head. Finally, he said, "They could not transmit us home!"

"What does that mean?" Jonko asked directly.

"It seems it was not our choice to make. There is a reason, as yet undefined, for us to remain here," Tymos shrugged slightly.

"Perhaps we must make a stand here," Kryslie proposed. "Had we continued this morning according to our itinerary we would have been in that city surrounded by aliens."

"They will come after us!" Tymos said with sudden conviction. "Tonight!"

"We will be with you," Jonko promised. "Kel and I."

Tymos grinned. "And father gave Kryslie and I two of the personal force fields those infiltrators wore. We should be fine too, and I want a chance to get at those aliens."

"They know some of our strengths," Kryslie reminded her twin. "And some of our defences."

"Some, not all," Tymos argued quietly. "If they do use that green force field, I bet the force shield should counter it."

"That force field didn't affect us," Keleb reminded them. "But why would you let yourself be caught?"

"To get them to take us to their base," Kryslie told him. "We still have our bio-monitors – we can be tracked. And we can learn things about them."

"Dangerous – they might simply kill you," Jonko warned.

"I don't think so," Tymos gave his considered opinion. "We are high enough in rank to be valuable. Listen – if they come for us, you can follow. Eight of the guards have these force

screens too, so they shouldn't be affected, but the aliens may be expecting such protection and try something else. Our idea is to pretend to be helpless and later overcome our attackers and work from there."

"I don't like it," Jonko admitted. "Nor will your father."

Kryslie did not admit to a shiver of premonition. "They will not kill us. They still think us naive, pampered, protected children. I think the alien leader that escaped will want to try to turn us against father. But he can have no idea who he is dealing with."

Jonko recalled the hours just past. "No..." he agreed.

The camp on the hill was quiet. Guards watched all the approaches, and listened for aircraft. They did not discount cloaked ships approaching, but even with sound muffled, they would be heard in the quiet of the night. The outer ring of guards, outside of the protective dome, faced away from the camp so that the faint purple glow of the shield did not affect their night vision. A second ring of guards, inside the screen, faced inwards.

The royal party was small, the king, his two heirs, the two wards of Governor Xyron, twelve servants and one Elder. The other Elders had remained in Losk to oversee the last of the judicial matter. The security contingent, doubled since the afternoon, was forty strong.

Within the tents, all was quiet. Kryslie listened to Delia's faint breathing, and Jonko's occasional movement. He didn't speak to her, they were both listening. Kryslie let herself recall Delia's scandalised comments when Jonko had insisted on sleeping in her tent. She accepted it when it was phrased as extra protection.

Two tents away, she knew Tymos and Keleb were also awake. Morov had chosen to put his sleeping cot across the entrance to the round tent, but he too slept.

Kryslie felt the first faint prickling of the hair on her neck and then an intense chill – like a wave of cold water passing over her. The almost silence seemed to become more intense. Her mind registered that her wrist timer had stopped its quiet tick.

"What was that?" Jonko asked.

"I don't know, but I am sure they are com..."

"What?" Jonko started to sit up, wondering why Kryslie had stopped talking in mid word. He heard no reply, and rolled off his cot to walk over to her. In his hand was a small portable light, and he opened it a slit. He saw that Kryslie's mouth was open as if still trying to speak. Her eyes glittered as if she was trying to signal the rest of the message. He didn't need telling. That one glimpse told him what was happening. He returned to his cot and quickly covered himself, feigning sleep. Through a narrow slit in his almost closed eyes, he watched a faint shadow pass around the tent. The silhouette was furtive...definitely not one of the guards. He had thought that the glow of the shield would betray their position, thought the senior guard explained that only Tymoreans could see it. Now he found it useful.

A sudden realisation made his heart race. He had to force himself to relax and keep his breathing even. The force shields, the protective dome had not stopped the aliens! He reminded himself that the aliens would have been ready for defences, as a shadow opened the tent flap. Only the faintest movement or air betrayed the fact that the shadow had entered. A faint light examined each of the sleepers.

Jonko closed his eyes when the light came in his direction, and opened them again when he heard a faint rustle of cloth. A small area of light shone down a black clad leg. The intruder had the light hooked to a belt, and it moved as he bent down to lift a limp and unresisting Kryslie over his shoulder.

Jonko watched as the shadow retreated and rose to peep through the tent flap. He felt an adrenaline rush as he began to follow the retreating figures. They never once looked around. He

came out of the tent in a low crouch and could see the man with Kryslie striding down the hill. He took in the absence of the purple glow, and the green one that replaced it. He saw movement from Tymos's tent as Keleb emerged. The three guards he could see were limp on the ground.

With a faint whistle, Jonko attracted Keleb's attention. He gestured, indicating he would go right in a flanking movement. Keleb began to run left. As they past the limp guards, each took a weapon, and continued to run, adrenaline kicking in as they began to follow the abductors.

The aliens were arrogant and confident that no one would see them. They never looked around and went in a straight line, not even trying to keep to cover. Jonko made use of that, and put trees between him and his quarry, able to increase his speed. He came unexpectedly to an open area with dim lights outlining six small ships. He came to a sudden stop. The area was not deserted. He counted twelve figures moving around – watchful and alert. Trying to sneak on board one of the ships would be suicidal. He watched the ships until he heard the abductors trotting closer. He aimed his weapon at the sound, and fired at the legs of the abductor as he passed the tree.

Nothing happened.

He tossed the useless weapon aside, and prepared to pursue and leap. He had to stop again. Two armed figures followed the abductor, looking for followers.

The nearest ship powered up, its outer lights becoming brighter. Jonko watched helplessly as Kryslie was bundled into the ship, and two figures followed. He heard the air seal slam shut.

Further away, a second ship powered up.

“Jon! Kel!” Jonko heard in his head, like when Tymos had tried telepathy on him.

“Listening,” he thought tersely, hoping Tymos could read it.

“Can you see the picture?”

“Yes!” It was vivid. A glowing white dome, with its base hidden by trees.

“Go there! It's the base ship. Northeast, twenty-nine miles. Summon power before you transmit. We'll need your help. Hurry!”

The two powered-up ships blasted upwards one after the other. When they were at twice the tree height, they flashed away in horizontal flight. Jonko glanced at the stars, to estimate the direction – north-east, just as Tymos had said. Two more of the six ships followed.

Keleb crept up next to Jonko, and faintly whistled a tune they both knew. “Nothing works,” Keleb whispered. “Will the transmitters?”

Jonko drew his into his palm, the green pin light glowed brightly. “Yes,” he confirmed. “You heard Tymos?”

“Yes. We follow?”

“I'll go now. You wait to see what the last two ships are waiting for. They had to have had a different green field on us, and I think they must have sent an EM pulse first to kill the shields and the guards' weapons.”

“Get going!” Keleb urged. “I'll be right along.”

Jonko wasted no more time – he keyed into the transmitter the distance and direction and pressed activate. He felt a subtle tingle as the repeller field pushed him away from something. He materialised amongst trees.

“Damn!” he thought. “I still didn't have the range.”

He waited for the transmitter to charge again and recalled Tymos's directions to summon power. He tried again with a similar result. As he waited for the next recharge, he heard the muffled sound of a ship flying overhead.

“At least I am going in the right direction,” he told himself, as he tried not to worry about his friends.

Keleb crouched in the cover of bushes and saw four heavily laden figures move into the light of the two remaining ships that were powered up, ready to lift. He couldn't make out what each pair of figures carried, but the loads were heavy, and each was hefted into a ship accompanied by stifled grunts and curses.

"Odds on," Keleb thought to himself. "Those things caused the green glow or the EM pulse. However, I don't think they will let me look at them."

He didn't wait for the two ships to lift, but stood up to follow Jonko. He gave a brief thought to going and alerting the camp, but the guards would still be useless. During the attack on the estate, it took most people about ten minutes to recover from the green force weapon. Right now, time was vital and Tymos and Kryslie needed their help. He transmitted along the line Jonko followed, and he too discovered the need to travel in stages.

At the camp of the Royal Party, the green glow had disappeared when the aliens had begun to dismantle the generator. After about five minutes, the residual effects of the field of force began to wear off and the unconscious guards began to pick themselves off the ground. Two began hunting for their weapons.

As soon as he could move again, Tymoros ran from his tent and checked the one next to it. He encountered a woozy Morov, stumbling out.

"Tymos?" Tymoros demanded.

"Not there," the servant said, fear for his charge evident in his widened eyes. "Nor is Keleb, Sire."

"Princess Kryslie is not her tent either, nor young Jonko," Aldiv reported from the other direction.

The first guards to wake up stood unsteadily and activated light sources and began to look around.

Clamping down on his fear and sense of helplessness, Tymoros began to give commands. "Contact the palace to have an air patrol sent up. Take the lights and see if you can find tracks. Find out what happened to the force screen."

He glanced at his personal force screen and saw it was not operational. He toggled the switch but felt no tingle of activation. He was not surprised when the guard returned to report the communications system was dead, and most of the weapons inoperative.

Full of very bitter anger, Tymoros sent a thought to Reslic. He felt his fellow Governor wake and become instantly alert. Reslic heard the report and promised immediate reinforcements and air support.

He could find only one positive; the two terran halflings were also missing. The aliens could have no suspicion that they had not been overcome. The two missing weapons confirmed that they were acting freely. He hoped they would not rely on the weapons – the high tech stunners would be as dead as the rest.

As he thought that, he remembered that the transmitters would not have been affected. That was something the aliens wouldn't know. The transmitters did not contain electronics as most species knew them. Instead, they had crystalline circuits, tuned to mind frequencies.

Jono and Perrin Reslic materialised through the purple glow of a long-range beam terminus. Behind them, a troop of guards and scouts came through and deployed ready for orders. Perrin gave directions as his brother spoke to Tymoros.

"You can do nothing here, Ty," Reslic said, placing a gentle, sympathetic hand on his friend. "Get the servants back to the estate. You should return too."

"No!" Tymoros refused, his anger simmering. "They are laughing at us. Telling us that we are weak and ineffectual, and that they can do as they like to us, go where they like. They came into my tent, checked I was there and left. They want me to suffer."

"Ty, they only think they are moving freely," Jono said intently.

“They have – my – children!”

“Yes, but your children are not what the aliens think they are,” Reslic stressed. “You and I know what Tymos and Kryslie are capable of – you saw it last afternoon. They killed, and they understood what they did. They are strong willed, and that is no longer a liability now that they are in full control of their power.”

“They do not have experience,” Tymoros argued.

“They have shared our minds and our experience. How they use that knowledge will be uniquely their doing, and I would not like to be the being that irritates them,” Reslic suggested. “Nor have we run out of options to find them.”

Tymoros seemed to slump. He did not want to admit Reslic was right. He should return to the estate and let those best-trained get to work. He had Llaimos to protect.

Although still unable to make his body move, Tymos had realized at once when the mental numbing had gone. His first instinct was to tell his friends where they were being taken. The flight plan and destination were clear in the pilot’s mind. Kryslie, as ever in tune with him, reminded him to mention how to extend the range of their personal transmitters. They were about to link and try to reach their father when a briefly glimpsed alien touched something to their necks. Blackness engulfed them as the rapid acting drug made them unconscious.

Eventually Tymos realized that he was again awake, but that his body would still not obey him. It was an improvement that he could feel the hard rocky ground beneath him. Then he became aware of the morning sun on his face and a chill throughout his body. Moving his eyes, showed him that he was in the focal point of an area of force and he could just make out the green aura.

“Krys?” Tymos thought mentally, for she wasn’t in his line of vision.

“I’m behind you Tymos,” Kryslie reassured him. “I have been awake for a while and I was afraid that they might have put the stronger field on us again because you would not answer me.”

“What stronger field,” Tymos tried to recall.

“At the camp...that field was not like the one used at the estate. I think the earlier intruders used a portable field, and it didn’t stop telepathy,” Kryslie began to explain. She sensed Tymos’s confusion.

“Jon and Kel are around, but can’t get to us yet. There are too many guards and for some reason they have us in the open. Kel saw aliens bringing bulky equipment back to the ships. He and Jon also think they sent an EM pulse to neutralise the guards’ weapons and the defence shield. I think they had the portable field on us until the big generator was set up.”

“How does that help us now?” Tymos asked. “We are stuck here like we were in glue.”

“I can’t fight this by myself, but we are stronger together. Try to sit up, Tym.”

Kryslie was herself fighting the lethargy induced by the alien force field. Her hands were glowing purple.

There was no mistaking it - the power they now fought against was alien and evil. Now two minds joined to a single purpose. Kryslie and Tymos dragged themselves together until they sat, each supporting the other, and then had to rest as even that much defiance had left them drained of energy. They could not draw in more from around them.

“You said Jon and Kel were around,” Tymos thought.

“I haven’t seen Keleb, but Jonko is in the cover of the trees that I can see at the edge of this open area.”

“Company,” Tymos warned mentally. “Must have seen us moving.”

Kryslie looked at the approaching group through her brother’s mind. She could study them without their awareness.

“Arrogant,” she murmured mentally. “Notice how his clothing mimics father’s robes of state, but in those ghastly shades of green?”

His clothes were elegant, a tunic over trousers in dark khaki green silk. The edges were trimmed with black and there were odd decorations on the left breast.

When the leader of the group strode closer, Kryslie studied his face. His facial structure and expression reminded her of the Tymorean Governors. His hair though, was light brown – a shade predominant amongst Tymorean commoners. His eyes, like those of the younger alien, had no white. She felt a touch of a mind on her mental shields and then she identified the alien. She had fought him when the aliens had attacked the Royal Estate.

He stopped and looked at them for what seemed like a long time.

“Your defiance, puny as it was, has shown me that you are more powerful than I expected,” he told them without preamble. “However, your power will not be sufficient to let you escape. I might say that nothing would delight me more than to kill you right now, but I want to learn more about you. I particularly want to know how your accursed father managed to keep your existence secret for so long. That, I will find out.” There was an anticipatory smile on his face.

“Don’t expect to see your fool of a father again,” he taunted further. “He should never have taken you away from the protection of the Estate. We may have failed to take you from there but here you are – helpless in my control!” He stalked around to look at Kryslie.

“Yes! Completely powerless,” he emphasized, watching her with suppressed hatred. “The two of you will pay for the loss of eleven of my men. Your little brother – he’s as good as dead too. No, on reflection, he’s young enough to be moulded. I will train him to lead our armies!” He seemed to find that idea a delicious joke.

“Don’t underestimate our Father,” Tymos warned, finding he was able to speak. He decided not to mention the other Governors.

“Oh, I don’t! I have his measure, I know how he thinks and I can out manoeuvre him. It was prophesied that his children would endanger our plans to control our ancestral world – I have enjoyed making sure that it wasn’t so. Twenty years we have been preparing for this invasion.”

“This isn’t your world anymore,” Kryslie denied.

“Our people were forced to leave here millennia ago,” he told her coldly. “We were lucky to find an uninhabited planet we called Aerdna – which means sanctuary...”

Memories of memories surfaced and Tymos said, “Your ancestors chose to leave. They went with mutual accord and took with them a terrain-reformer.”

“I do not need a wet-eared whelp claiming to know Aeronite history!” the alien leader said harshly.

“Obviously it is not such a sanctuary now,” Tymos remarked.

“Or they wouldn’t be trying to run home to their mummies,” Kryslie added, knowing she would irritate the alien. “They didn’t know how to look after their own planet, so they want to come and wreck ours. You should be trying to find who caused the fluctuations in Aerdna’s orbit, not starting a war you will lose. Your people have only a few more years before the problem reaches critical levels.”

“You will not preach to me! We did not cause the problem. We will regain control of this world and bring our people here!”

Kryslie sensed his anger, and realised his mind shields had slipped. She saw the image of hooded figures and sensed that another race was helping the Aeronites.

“You are deluded,” Tymos told him. “Coming here isn’t the answer.”

“Pah! We have the right to be here and you children...can’t stop me.”

“You think!” Kryslie taunted, and received a withering glare.

The alien switched to his own language, but continued to watch Kryslie.

"I won't keep them here any longer," he said casually to the surrounding guards. "It's obvious that the Governors are too stupid to find them. Take them to the ship's detention level, Cell Theta. It's all prepared for them! There's no need to be gentle!"

He smiled nastily, sure that his prisoners had understood him. He watched as his commands were obeyed and he led the procession back to his base ship.

Eight of the encircling guards touched something belted to their waist. The items seemed like flat boxes. Each then took an unresisting arm or leg of one of the prisoners in an extremely tight grip

Some of the remaining guards preceded the group the rest followed.

"We must escape," Tymos stressed in his mind.

"If we were free to move we could overpower these guards, but they have the portable field generators," Kryslie thought back at her brother. "And our borrowed protective screen generators don't seem to be working. I assume too, that our bio-monitors are also inactive or out of range."

"Can you see Jon?" Tymos asked feeling his arms being stretched and jolted.

"No, but I assume he will follow. Can you see anything of the ship...?"

Kryslie stopped thinking at her brother suddenly. "I think my arm has been dislocated," she finally continued.

She felt Tymos in her mind and the pain began to numb.

"Thanks," she thought with relief.

"It isn't fixed," he warned her.

"I know, Tym. That bastard has it in for us!" she commented. "That's the one that escaped from the Estate. He's not just after us on principle, it's personal."

Tymos gave a wordless mental acknowledgement.

"All I could see before was a white dome above the trees," he thought back – referring to his sister's earlier question. "I don't know if it was the ship or a visual distortion of it."

"We will undoubtedly find out," Kryslie thought. "However I do not wish to be on it when they decide to blast off."

"No!" Tymos agreed lapsing into silence and watching patches of sky through the treetops as they were being carried. He tried to use pain-numbing techniques on his own arms and legs with only minimal success.

Jonko hadn't understood the alien leader's commands but they had soon become obvious. When the last of the rear guards had entered the trees, Jonko ran swiftly and silently across the clearing and caught up to the group. In the dimness of the trees, the guards carrying his friends were visible by the green glow around them; which was invisible in the patches of bright sunlight. The guards not carrying the prisoners were carefully keeping back out of the range of the force field.

Jonko waited for his chance and it came when one of the guards dropped back. Whatever his intention had been, he didn't get a chance to do it because Jonko launched a swift and deadly attack. He quickly pulled the body off the track, stripped it of the brown uniform, and pulled that on over his own clothes. With the dead alien's weapon in hand and helmet visor over his face, he sprinted after the others but pulled up a short way behind and started scanning both sides of the track. He reminded himself to keep his eyes half closed, if he raised the visor, so that there was less chance of the aliens spotting the white in his eyes.

The distance from the clearing to the ship was about a mile and when the group had emerged from the trees, he saw the white distortion field was actually spherical in shape. Aliens were coming and going like walking through a wall. The alien leader didn't even pause as he strode through the white glow and up to the grey-walled space ship. Inside, after climbing a steep ramp into the huge squat structure, the walls were the same unadorned metal as outside and the only contrast was the striped colour coding on the numerous doors. The alien leader kept

walking until he reached a door with black triangular markings. After opening it by use of a hand print scanner, he stood back to let the prisoners be taken in first. The door closed on the leader and the eight force protected guards dumped the prisoners unceremoniously on the metal floor while awaiting further orders.

At a barked command, one of the guards switched off the force field and the leader strode over to the first of two stasis pods. He snapped it open and indicated for one of the prisoners to be lifted into it. Kryslie reacted to the removal of the force field with weak struggles – all she was currently capable of and which were totally ineffective. Tymos managed no better and they lifted him as easily into the second pod and secured him.

“The air in these pods is limited,” the alien leader said with deliberation in the Tymorean language, while watching for a reaction from his prisoners. Kryslie simply glared at him. “If you struggle you will use up the air in it faster than we feed it in. If you try to push the lid open you will find that it is highly charged.”

He took a device from his pocket and touched the neck of each prisoner.

“Just something to keep you obedient until the medic connects you up to the pod’s facilities. Deep sleep is an excellent way to keep prisoners out of trouble.”

Kryslie felt as if a cold breeze had been forced through her body. From neck down, she became numb. Moments later the pod lid was closed and locked. She remained awake and surrendered to a surge of anger; it was preferable to the flush of humiliation. It was no help that Tymos felt the same.

It was well that the alien leader was unaware of the strength of his prisoners’ telepathic talent. It was all that kept them from succumbing to despair. Working together, they began to utilize techniques for speeding up their metabolism. They had to make the process gradual so that their breathing did not increase but a desire to be out of the pod was rapidly increasing in urgency. They both hoped Jonko was close and could help them.

The alien leader dismissed most of the guards, leaving two in the passage. They had been chosen simply because they had been closest to the door. Jonko hid his satisfaction at fooling the leader. His companion scowled in silence – not pleased at the extra duty. Out of the corner of his eye, Jonko was studying the hand print scanner that opened the door and sealed it again. He was reviewing all the things he knew about that kind of device and was about to try forcing it when the alien leader returned with a drably dressed, elderly male. Jonko watched the door being opened and before it closed, he slipped into the cell and waited near the door, acting alert.

The alien leader didn’t comment on his presence, in fact he seemed pleased at the initiative shown and simply turned back to the job in hand – reopening the pods for the medic to do his work. In fact, he was enjoying humiliating Kryslie by watching while the medic prepared and connected her to the facilities in the pod. Jonko drew closer, waiting for him to open Tymos’s pod.

Kryslie guessed what was happening although she could feel nothing - her anger with her captor increased. Yet as long as he wasn’t actually touching her, she could pretend there was nothing to see.

She concentrated on the one positive factor that she could think of – the procedure was meant to take care of the waste disposal problem for the pod’s occupant and she had been in dire need of that for some hours. She changed her glare to a smile of bliss and saw the alien scowl.

The alien stalked over to the other pod and opened it with a snap – that was all that Jonko was waiting for. He didn’t try to withhold his strength when he chopped at the neck of the alien and was almost sorry that the creature hadn’t died.

The medic heard the noise of his superior falling to the metal floor and turned around in terror. He stuttered incomprehensibly and raised his hands to surrender but Jonko didn't hesitate and granted the medic similar treatment though at modified force.

Tymos was trying to sit up in his pod and he had already snapped the reinforced restraints. Jonko lifted him out easily and set him on his feet but Tymos was not yet ready to walk. He balanced himself using the side of the pod and determinedly lifted each foot in turn to return sensation to them. As Jonko moved to help Kryslie, Tymos noticed that the floor where he was standing was grid-like which suggested drainage when the floor was washed. Feeling an urgent need returning he decided that he had no qualms about further befouling the alien's already obscene cell.

Kryslie had already torn free of the chest restraint but was not able to sit up and see how she had been 'connected' to the pod. In her mind was information about the design of such pods.

"Jon, can you pull those tubes out!" she hissed, annoyed at her own helplessness.

Jonko blushed but complied and then lifted her gently to her feet. Kryslie quickly realized the reason for her friends blush and tried to prevent one of her own. She pointed to the unconscious alien leader and said, "Take his trousers off, Jon!"

Jonko grinned maliciously at the justice in the suggestion. Kryslie watched with an unladylike glee and anticipated the creature's anger when he woke. With the material at the bottom of the legs rolled up, Kryslie pulled the fine dark green fabric over her own torn travel clothes. The waist was a bit loose so she took the aliens belt and made use of the sticky fabric.

"They did a good job of searching us," Kryslie muttered, annoyed. "No transmitters, no bio-monitors, no timepiece, nothing."

Tymos walked around to his sister and decided some further humiliation was in order for the alien leader.

"Put them in the pods, Jon, and lock them down," was his suggestion.

Still grinning, Jonko obeyed.

"They'll be missed soon," he commented by way of a warning. His friends were moving more freely by the minute. Tymos took a few moments to work his sister's arm back into place and used his gift to help it heal.

"Let's go," Tymos directed but Jonko put up his hand to stop them.

"Stay out of sight a minute – let me deal with the other guard."

With his friends hidden either side of the door, Jonko pressed the mechanism to unseal it. He was glad that the alien hadn't bothered with the auto reseal. When the door opened, Jonko half stepped out and beckoned the unsuspecting guard. Tymos disabled him and the three of them left the cell and allowed the door to shut behind them.

"We've got to find Keleb!" Kryslie said. "I can't feel his mind – he may have been taken prisoner. Jon, walk around this level and see if you can locate him down here. Tymos and I will move upwards and see what we can learn."

"It will be dangerous for you if the leader is freed," Jonko expressed his concern.

"For him!" Tymos promised.

"He will not have us as prisoners again," Kryslie said adamantly. "They have our transmitters, can we have yours?"

Jonko handed it to her with out question.

"Guard yourself, Jon," Tymos warned as he and Kryslie began to run quickly and silently along the currently deserted corridors and deeper into the ship.

Chapter 40 - Enemy Territory

In this enemy territory, Tymos and Kryslie expected to meet aliens. They drew on their power, enhanced all their senses and were ready to defend themselves, or to freeze into a semblance of invisibility when they warped the air around them. Though they would need to use the latter skill sparingly as it took personal energy to maintain the 'invisibility' and within the alien ship, they could not draw on the natural aura of the planet.

"Sensor ahead – roof level," Tymos warned as they trotted along the passage. A second later, an alarm began, but they were no longer near that sensor.

"Door to the right," Kryslie noted a microsecond after her twin's warning. "Maintenance hatch."

They stopped abruptly and Tymos jerked on the opening handle and twisted it. As soon as the door opened, they both slipped in. Kryslie closed the door and jammed it shut.

They were in darkness, but their eyes adjusted quickly, and they determined that they were in a small cul-de-sac at the junction of two passageways – one going left and right and another going up and down. In that place the alarm sound was muted by the walls, but they could feel the vibration from running feet in the passage they had left, and voices echoing in the maintenance passages.

Instinctively, they pushed back into the small alcove opposite the hatch and drew power around themselves. Someone tried to open the hatch from the other side. Kryslie listened mentally to the nearby aliens as Tymos studied their surroundings.

"They are sending someone to check that door," Kryslie warned. "They are checking all the doors."

"This area has sensors, currently inactive," Tymos thought in return.

When the lighting began to cycle up, both Tymos and Kryslie stood perfectly still.

"Krys, the lighting is part of some kind of sensor field. I can feel the energy on my face, like it was sunlight."

Even before Tymos spoke the words in his mind, Kryslie had the thought, "We can use this power." They both drew on it, like breathing it in.

"Was there a field like this in the other passageway?" Krys asked her twin. She hadn't noticed anything.

"No, I don't think so, or the alarm would have started sooner."

The voices drew closer. Two men stopped at the jammed door and forced it open. Four guards in black coveralls, black tabards and close fitting black beanie hats pushed into the tunnel, and shoved the brown clad workers aside.

"Any sign of the intruders?"

"No, Sir."

"What was wrong with the door?"

"Jammed. Some fool shut it wrong. Took us both to open it. Your intruder couldn't have got through."

Kryslie and Tymos understood the conversation through the mind of the squad leader. They then heard him thinking, "Damned rodents. Warlord Kellex won't be convinced that is all that triggered the alarm unless he sees the carcass."

Aloud he said, "Move on. Keep checking. Probably was only a rodent since it was only this area that was set off. But we have to be thorough."

They sensed the group moving away, and the workers reclosing the hatch.

“That squad leader has a trace of power,” Kryslie told her brother mentally. “I am glad he did not find us because he would have taken us to his superior and enjoyed seeing us suffer. I wonder how many more of the crew have a trace of power.”

“If every squad has one of them, we will be able to avoid them,” Tymos suggested. “But we need to get moving and find out about this ship and discover a way to stop it leaving.”

“And get our bio-monitors and transmitters back,” Kryslie added. “Some of these aliens just might be able to get them to work. I still can’t sense Keleb either, and I have the fear that he was caught too. I hope Jonko can find him.”

By mutual agreement, they decided to climb up a level. As they moved, they maintained a steady draw on the ambient energy of the sensor web. They noticed that the lights dimmed in their location, but brightened again when they were past. No more alarms went off.

On the next level, they emerged into a corridor nearly identical to the one below. The difference lay in the colour of the symbols on the doors and walls. Now they were red, not black. The sensor web was still in evidence.

“People coming,” Kryslie warned. She turned slowly, trying to locate the presences she sensed. “From the right!”

She pushed aside the realisation that she had seen the people as hazy outlines through the wall.

Tymos ran forward and held himself against the right wall, immediately next to the next cross passage. Kryslie crouched low, opposite him; both cloaked themselves with power.

A squad of four guards came into view; all looked each way at the intersection, saw nothing and began to stride on.

Two to one odds were no problem to Tymos or Kryslie. With their instinctive awareness of each other, the guards had no warning of their two pronged attack, and no chance to send an alarm.

Tymos quickly frisked their four victims, found that each had an odd-looking disc around their neck and took them.

He pocketed two of the weapons and passed two to Kryslie before she moved further down the passage. She found a door, and tried to open it using the keypad.

“Try Jon’s transmitter,” Tymos thought at her, as he began to drag two of the men that way.

Kryslie accepted the suggestion and was relieved when the unit charged. She disappeared from Tymos’s view, but reappeared when the locked door opened. She took over dragging the first two men as Tymos went back for the other two. The room was some kind of storage cubicle.

“I disabled the sensor,” Kryslie told her brother.

“Good. We should strip two of these and put their uniforms over our clothes,” Tymos suggested. He didn’t need to think that they would be less conspicuous than maintaining their current garb. Kryslie was relieved to hide the green of the stolen trousers, and to push most of her hair under the hat. She took two of the odd discs from Tymos.

“These guards move on groups of four,” Kryslie noted. “Two of us by ourselves would be suspicious.”

She checked the weapons taken from the guards and identified their means of operation.

“Stealth foremost,” Tymos agreed with his sister’s meaning. “We need to get access to the computer system.”

They did not have time to keep creeping around the maintenance areas, so they strode purposefully along passages, letting instinct guide them towards the more inhabited sections of the ship. Tymos maintained a watch with physical senses and Kryslie used mind senses. She became adept at locating approaching aliens, guards and others, and once warned, they both sent the message, ‘there is no one here’, or ‘we belong here – nothing is strange’ or similar mind commands. The passing aliens either did not see them, or did not find their presence odd.

Occasionally, Tymos checked with Jonko.

“There is a tightly guarded section on that lower level,” he told Kryslie. “Jon’s trying to find a way in.”

Kryslie acknowledged briefly, and told her twin, “All these doors are empty.”

Tymos tried to open one and commented. “Needs a handprint to open the lock.”

“Good thing we don’t need one. There is a crowd of presences coming this way - two guards at least judging from the thoughts in their minds.”

“Transmit into this room,” Tymos suggested. He pulled Kryslie close and took them both in.

“Personal sleeping cabin,” Tymos thought, and then realised Kryslie wasn’t heeding him. “What?”

“I want to look out,” Kryslie thought at him as she began to move back to the door. Tymos grabbed her arm.

“What for?”

“I think some of those approaching are Tymoreans – probably prisoners. I can sense – faintly – power like ours. But most of the minds seem to be in a walking stupor.”

“Krys...No!” Tymos spoke sharply, and then switched back to mind speech. “We can’t rescue them now. We need to find Kel and stay free ourselves.”

Two emotions warred in Kryslie’s mind, and she knew Tymos shared them, but his decision was right. The people she sensed were in no condition to fight, and would need a lot of help to get away. If she were seen and identified, these aliens would be after her. Harsh truth, but they would have to help in other ways. Tymos released her, knowing her decision.

“This cabin has a computer. Keep alert while I try to bring up a schematic of the ship and try to find a way to ground it.”

Part of Kryslie’s mind was taking in the information her brother was coaxing from the computer. No one had taught them how to infiltrate a computer, but that information had come to mind when they needed it. The rest of her mind was alert for other presences impinging on her senses. The group that had just gone past was moving away.

“These computers are limited,” Tymos murmured. “But I have a schematic of each level. Engineering, or whatever they call it, is up three levels. We should be able to access control systems from there. Can you sense anyone in the room above? From the floor plan it is more personnel space.”

Kryslie turned her attention upward, and a hazy image of the area came into her mind. She reached out for her brother’s hand and the image sharpened. She identified an area of clear space and estimated the distance. At her nod, Tymos transmitted to her mind coordinates.

They stood still and listened. Kryslie gestured to an inner door and mentally sent, “Sleeper.”

Tymos went to check as Kryslie quietly investigated the outer room. She found a compartment with two purple uniforms and assorted other clothes.

Tymos returned from the inner room. “He’ll stay asleep at least an hour. This is good. Purple is engineering. Think I should change? Is there one of those disc tags in there.”

Kryslie recalled noting the item and leant into the space to get it. “What do you need it for?”

Instead of answering, Tymos trotted to the room’s computer and expertly entered commands. The screen now showed a range of devices with decals and sigils. Tymos brought out one of the guard’s discs and held it next to one picture. Kryslie mentally matched hers to another. “So?”

“These discs belong to guards. I think that gives them access to areas outlined in black on the schematic,” Tymos explained.

“Which is most places,” Kryslie observed when Tymos brought up schematics again.

“Yes, and this purple one is for engineering. I think if we have this with us, the security won’t pick us as intruders.”

“We only have one,” Kryslie reminded him.

“Yes, but us drawing on the sensor web power has made us invisible to it. This is extra protection.”

“I trust your instinct, bro, but we need to hurry. They’ll find that odorous Kellex soon, and realise we are missing.”

Tymos closed down the computer, and they looked for a place on the level above to transmit to. They paused briefly in an empty recreation area, before seeking a clear space above – which was in a side section of the engineering level. The clear space was occupied, but they transmitted in behind the men and were ready for action.

With no sound of a cry or a scuffle, two purple clad aliens became unconscious and were dragged behind a bank of instruments. “I’ll keep watch and keep people disinterested in this area,” Kryslie offered.

Tymos nodded and went to the table like object that had occupied the engineer’s attention. He memorised the details on the screen with a single scan and manipulated the control pad to ring up others.

Kryslie stood still, cloaked with power that she replaced by what she was drawing from the instruments and machines around her. Whenever she saw movement, she sent the thought. “This area is empty, there is no one here. Twice, men dressed in purple glanced her way, saw no one and kept moving on.

She studied all she saw, and gradually moved to bring more into her view. She spotted a group of purple clad people at the far end of the open main section of engineering. To her senses, they were studying something strange and fascinating.

“Done,” Tymos sent the thought. “I’ve locked out the engines, though I’m not sure how long it will stop them, and I have the security codes. I am sure Kel is down in that security area, but I can get us in.”

“You go and help Jonko. I want to go and see what has the engineers so excited down there. I think it is our stuff.”

“Keep Jon’s transmitter – use it to join us,” Tymos said.

“Okay, but get going while all the attention is yonder.”

Kryslie watched Tymos depart at a purposeful walk, and picked up his mental projection of, “I belong here.” He disappeared from her sight. She waited a minute longer and repeated her brother’s actions, but moved along the left wall of the open area. She stopped next to the wall, within sight of the avid group of engineers, and drew on the ambient energy to hide her presence.

Only this time, someone could still see her.

“Commander Vila,” a man spoke from beside her. She held herself from betraying surprise and translated from the alien language, which was like an old Tymorean dialect.

Projecting the thought of, “I am who you think I am,” Kryslie said “Yes.” She spoke in her own language, but projected the meaning of her word to the alien’s mind. She did not turn to face the speaker, but kept her attention on the activity around a bench.

The alien continued to speak. “Your Guardian gave you orders to remain in your quarters.”

“My guardian suggested that I remain there,” Kryslie improvised. “It was not an order.”

“Commander Vila!” the man said patiently, but he was keeping a tight control on some dark emotion. “You are not yet commanding our armies. I am surprised that he trusts you and those other wards of his with so much power. I will tell him that you disobeyed his instructions.”

“That is enough!” Kryslie spoke back with such an air of authority the alien visibly flinched. “Go running to my guardian if you wish, right now if you want to. He won’t take kindly to your interruption or tattling.”

The alien looked uncomfortable but rallied.

“When your guardian is finished dealing with the prisoners, I will notify him of your disobedience.”

“I am not concerned.” Kryslie projected an aura of confidence, of being sure of her ground. She had the impression that this male was high up in Leader Kellex’s hierarchy. Not like his second in command, but at least commander level like the ‘Vila’ he had mistaken her for.

“Go and tell tales then. I would like to be present when my guardian interrogates the prisoners.”

“He is in the security level,” the alien said helpfully. “He has given orders for no one to disturb him.”

There was an air of anticipation in the alien, as if he wanted to see this impertinent child receive the harsh end of his superiors tongue or worse.

“Go about your business!” Kryslie ordered, but the alien remained where he was. Kryslie started to walk closer to the people about the bench. The man followed.

“Commander,” the alien called from behind her. Kryslie turned and waited for him to speak. “Why don’t you take the chamber down?”

He was still anticipating his superior’s mood.

“In good time,” Kryslie snapped back at him, continuing to walk away. She was curious about the ‘chamber’ - that must be the means by which the alien had arrived so unexpectedly. The alien continued to follow Kryslie, and whilst he couldn’t see her, she reduced the force of her suggestion and attempted to read his mind. It was full of the idea of a confrontation between his superior and his superior’s ward and his mental vision carried a clear picture of Commander Vila. Kryslie saw a face that was almost identical to her own. Surely her suggestion had not been that overpowering?

Something had distracted the alien from his thoughts and it seemed to be the activity of the scientists.

He stopped following Kryslie and went across to them, Kryslie followed. With that alien to vouch for her “identity”, she would not be in immediate danger. Subtly she began reinforcing the idea as she had when facing the alien. It seemed that somebody had sensed the thought for several beings had looked up, surprised, and began talking to her.

“Vila, look at these artefacts, the prisoners were wearing them and yet they seem only to be ornaments. We know what these are...” she held up the personal screen generators.

The speaker was young and seemed to be a friend of Vila. “What do you make of the other things?”

Kryslie kept her eyes down so that she would not betray the white in them and went to examine the ‘artefacts’. She knew what they were – their biomonitors, both hers and Tymos’s, transmitters the aliens had taken from them; three transmitters, she had Jonko’s and so the third must be Keleb’s. The aliens had captured a spy – they had caught Keleb!

“A communication device?” Kryslie suggested, talking about the transmitter she picked up.

“We have scanned it thoroughly,” a scientist explained. “It reacts to no frequency, even when pressing the disc. And we can find no power source to operate the screen.”

“Perhaps it is a locator or scanner,” Kryslie persisted.

“If it is - how does it work?” Vila’s friend asked.

Kryslie shrugged. “Some kind of data input device?”

She wondered how to retrieve them without raising suspicion. Kryslie handed the device back before it powered up.

“I cannot spend more time on the problem. I have duties elsewhere.” Kryslie moved out of the group. The alien that had been following her stayed fiddling with a second transmitter. Kryslie slipped away unaccompanied.

“Tymos?” she thought when she was alone.

“Krys, where are you?” Tymos’s mental voice responded.

“They definitely have Keleb. They have our bio-monitors, personal force screen generators and three transmitters. Have you got to Keleb yet?”

“Jon’s run into trouble. We need a diversion – can you get the transmitters?”

“Too many people, even if they do think I am someone else. I played along but couldn’t take the things.”

At that moment, loud alarms began ringing. Messages and orders were being piped throughout the ship.

“I would say our former captor has been found,” Kryslie thought calmly. “Time is short.”

“Jon!” Tymos thought strongly at his friend’s mind.

Tymos found Jonko’s mind and read his reply. “I walked into a dead end corridor and a large group of guards were not far behind me. I pretended to be unconscious and they are taking me to their infirmary, I will escape from there.”

Tymos thought at Kryslie. “If they think you are someone else, you go to Kel. I will create a diversion and grab our transmitters and then get Jonko safe. Can you bring Jon’s transmitter to me?” he sent an image and an approximate distance and direction.

Kryslie arrived near her brother.

He was working at a computer terminal in what looked like a maintenance cubbyhole. He mentally said, “Wait a moment,” as he continued to input a stream of commands. A large number of red lights began flashing, as he took the transmitter Kryslie held out to him. He transmitted away, but was back a short time later and gave her two transmitters.

During the short wait, Kryslie tried to reach Keleb’s mind again but still sensed nothing.

“They saw me and will be looking for an intruder. We must move quickly. Jon has given me coordinates for the infirmary.”

Tymos transmitted away and Kryslie gave herself a moment to orientate herself. In her mind were the schematics of each level, and mental arrows pointing to her position and destination. She chose to return to near the cell where they had been at first. The door to that cell was open, and she risked a glance inside. Empty as she had expected. No doubt, Leader Kellex would have immediately gone to replace his missing clothes. This would be the last place they would expect to find her, and the searching guards were moving away from her. Kryslie strode away from the cell towards the high security area and hoped to be able to use the security codes Tymos had found, and which were in her mind.

Mentally emphasizing her resemblance to ‘Commander Vila’, Kryslie pushed groups of guards aside saying that the escapees had been seen on the engineering level and told them to search there. The tone of command in her voice and their belief that she was a Commander made them obey without question.

Kryslie reached a wall and her perceptions told her that Keleb lay beyond, unconscious and at the mercy of the alien leader – an extremely angry and vengeful alien leader. While she tried to check all of the room, she sensed a presence behind her. It was not hostile and it did not feel alien.

“Tym!” she thought, turning around. She did not see her brother, but a young child.

“You are not Vila!” The child spoke in the alien tongue. “Who are you?”

Kryslie looked at the child. He had red hair, round features and was very like her brother.

“I am Kryslie.” She kept her voice even, unthreatening. “I am your sister!”

The knowledge came from deep within her and it was the truth. The child was about ten years old; he was indeed Tymorean and still too young to betray signs of power but not too young to be taught alien ways.

“Vila is my only sister!” there was hardness in his voice that told of alien training.

“Guards!” he shouted in an unexpectedly loud voice. Kryslie reacted fast, grabbing the child and transmitting into the next room. The child struggled fiercely in her grip, already he was strong. He sent a silent call for help not realizing that his captor would intercept it. The alien leader, directing his assistants to some action to try to rouse his prisoner did not turn around. The guard beside him acted lightning fast; he drew and aimed his weapon at Kryslie, firing in the same fluid motion.

She reacted even faster, putting one hand at arms length as if to shield herself. Her other still held the struggling child. The energy bolt was perfectly reflected; the guard's weapon fused into a blob of molten alloy, burning his hand and causing him to drop the remains of the weapon.

In the brief moments that it had taken for these events to occur, the alien leader had turned and drawn his weapon. The child was continuing to struggle, but Kryslie did not release him. Instead, she transmitted again to a point behind the alien leader. She thrust the child who had travelled with her, into the partly disabled guard and leapt at the alien leader. She obtained his weapon and dragged him backwards so that he partly shielded her. He resisted furiously but Kryslie pressed on a certain nerve and she knew her prisoner would be in pain.

“Keep struggling,” she whispered, “Give me one more reason to kill you!”

The leader slumped and became a dead weight but Kryslie held him easily; before he began to struggle again, she pressed on a nerve and momentarily paralysed him. The guard, recovering his balance eyed Kryslie warily as she aimed the leader's weapon at the injured guard. He was in amour, which partly covered his face, yet for a moment, Kryslie's newly realized perception superimposed a face onto the amour and it was very like her brother's face. That he had intercepted a thought sent by the boy made him dangerous indeed.

The other aliens in the room, the assistants and guards, had not moved. The former were unarmed and the latter did not wish to injure their leader. They looked to the injured guard for guidance.

“Have every one drop their weapons.” Kryslie said aloud. “If they do not then your leader will be as dead as he deserves.”

No one in the room doubted her hatred of her captive.

“You are virtually unarmed. That paralysing ray will not touch me!” the injured guard claimed.

He was bluffing, Kryslie knew. Her prisoner's weapon had been more deadly than that, but his armour may be proof against it.

“I do not rely simply on artificial weapons. I prefer to fight with my hands and my mind,” Kryslie retorted and she closed her hand more tightly on the leader's vital nerve centre. The guard gave the command to drop weapons.

“Tell them to free the prisoner!” Kryslie instructed, sensing that her time was limited and that the guard was expecting a chance to turn the tables. He was waiting for something. The assistants slowly obeyed the second command, glancing warily from the injured guard to Kryslie.

“Vila! The force field.” The guard shouted suddenly.

Kryslie suddenly felt three times heavier as the gravity was abruptly increased, but she was able to stay on her feet. She knew having to fight the extra gravity would slow her, but with her power strong within her, she would not be as helpless as her opponent believed. She dropped her hold of the alien leader, knowing that an attack would come from the disarmed guard and that his injury would be no handicap. The assistants had collapsed into heaps from the force and the guards were reaching with slow determination, for their weapons. The child behind her tried to push her off balance. Kryslie reached a hand for her transmitter and felt a warning tingle - the gravity field would interfere with her transmission beam. The guard with her brother's face sprang at her, his armour suit powered so he was unaffected by the force. He knocked her to the floor and lay on her - suddenly immobile. The other guards were still trying to move.

Tymos did not use telepathy. “Jon, use this weapon on anyone who moves. I will get Keleb.”

He entered the gravity field, wary of its effect. Walking in it was very hard work. Kryslie crawled from under the guard and put a hand on his armour above his forehead.

“Krys, come on!”

She moved from near the guard but found it hard to stand and so crawled slowly to the door.

The effect of the weapon on the guard was wearing off and he was beginning to stir.

“Look out for others, Jon. We have to escape before anyone else is alerted,” Tymos called.

Tymos finished freeing Keleb and lifted him gently in his arms and walked slowly back to the door.

Kryslie saw the child trying to leave through another door across the room. She forced herself to go faster, and once she was out of the ultra-grav field, she sent flick of warning to her brother and transmitted away.

“We have to leave,” Tymos sent back urgently.

“That child must come with us!” Krys insisted with no explanation but Tymos saw a picture of the child’s face and suddenly knew who he was. He passed Keleb to Jonko and was ready to go to his sister if she needed him.

She transmitted back with the child who was now unconscious and they wasted no further time in starting their escape. Transmitting had to be done with care; it was necessary to be sure they would not re-materialize in the presence of aliens.

The first step was to the cell like room on the black coded level. From there, Tymos perceived the exterior and Kryslie looked below the ship. There was a cordon of guards around the ship looking for them to come out, but the area beneath the spacecraft was deep in darkness and would cover them long enough to seek their next coordinates. From that position they sought further away, there was no cover until they reached the ring of forest trees. They transmitted to a position just short of the trees and ran into cover on foot. Kryslie was still carrying the child and Jonko now had Keleb but Kryslie knew how desperately weak Keleb was. They ran through the trees looking back occasionally to check for pursuit. The dome shaped camouflage screen that hid the true size of the ship was opaque and luminescent from this side but had been transparent from the other. Many people were emerging from the luminescent dome, and running towards them.

Chapter 41 - Escape

“Jon, can you remember the route you took to get here?” Tymos urged.

“Yes,” Jonko told him still running but not out of breath.

“Think of a place!” Tymos told him and saw a picture in Jonko’s mind. They transmitted to the place where Jonko had ambushed the guard.

“Visualize another point that you passed getting here!” Tymos asked again. He stopped running, but kept scanning the area around them, they were still very close to their enemies. Keleb groaned, and Kryslie put the child down to go to him.

Once Jonko had visualised another waypoint, but before they moved onward, Kryslie took Keleb on her shoulder and told Jonko, “Take the child.” The next transmission took them into the centre of the clearing where the alien leader had first left them.

“Another coordinate please,” Tymos instructed and the process was repeated.

After the third jump, they had reached the more open country where the small alien ships sat idle. They discarded the notion of trying to fly one. Tymos had knowledge coming into his mind, but they had no actual experience. They also did not know if the ships could be traced by the leader or remotely disabled. Kryslie looked around for a place to stop. This was still too close to the enemy. They went further.

Jonko and Keleb had needed to take many flits to reach the enemy area, and one of the waypoints Jonko remembered was to an open area on a ridge of a mountain. He had come that way in the dark, but his sense of distance and direction was accurate.

Normal eyes would see nothing, but the Tymorean High King’s children were not ordinary. Part instinct, part perception and an instinct for the planetary aura, showed Kryslie a place to stop.

“Tymos, there is a cave over to the north, on the hill side near the dip in the ridge!” Kryslie indicated. “We have to stop, Keleb cannot go further.”

Tymos obeyed the tacit command and transmitted them just short of the cave. Jonko put the child down by Kryslie and he and Tymos entered the cave to scout for signs of aliens or other creatures.

Tymos returned. “There are signs of old occupation but it is empty now. It will do for tonight.”

Kryslie carried Keleb into the darkness of the cave moving with sureness and placing Keleb carefully on a patch of sandy ground. Tymos followed with the child.

Tymos turned to Keleb and touched him gently, realizing with a shock how weak his friend was.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Tymos asked.

“We needed to get away. I have been giving him some of my power,” Kryslie explained.

“Why did that Kellex do this to him?” Tymos asked softly. “Should we have killed him when we had the chance?”

“No!” Kryslie answered equally softly. “Having encountered him and his ways we can foresee his likely actions. If he were dead, the aliens would appoint another in his place. I fancy his superiors will not be happy that he let us escape and I know he is angry and perhaps that will make him act foolishly. Help Keleb, Tym, I must speak to the child.”

The child had become conscious and was struggling to get free but Jonko gripped him firmly.

“Why did you take me?” he spat at her when he became aware of Kryslie’s approach. “My guardian will find me. He will destroy you!”

“Steady, my young friend,” Kryslie said gently. “Do you know who I am?”

“I remember who you said you were, but I don’t believe you!” the child spat again.

“Are you not even curious as to my resemblance to Vila and my brother’s resemblance to Jordan?” the question was sent mentally. “Are you curious as to why I would claim you as kin?”

“No!” the child reacted violently. “You are not my kin, you are a barbarian!”

“Am I? I am not talking to you vocally. Does your guardian do that or any others besides Jordan and Vila?”

“No, Jordan says the ability is degenerate; that it is bad, evil and I must ignore it.” The child’s assurance was breaking. He was remembering his brother telling him to say nothing about it to their guardian unless he wanted to be beaten.

“Why did your guardian torture my friend?” Kryslie asked still very gently, for pictures came into the child’s mind that he would rather forget. He had seen what his guardian had done to the prisoner.

“I want to show you what sort of person Keleb is.”

Kryslie made vivid pictures in the child’s mind to replace those of the tortured Keleb. The pictures showed how gentle Keleb was and his affinity to animals.

“Leave me alone! Why are you doing this to me?” the child screamed.

“I wanted to show you that we are not evil!” Kryslie told him steadily. “I wanted to give you a view of those your guardian would have you fight. Perhaps you won’t believe me when I say I am your sister. One day, if you choose to accept the truth, we would welcome you.”

Kryslie took the child’s hand in the darkness. He tried to pull it free, but couldn’t. She spoke aloud, softly. “Release him Jon.”

She said to the child, “We would like you to travel with us for a while.”

“I don’t want to!” he said with a trace of defiance.

“Please yourself!” Kryslie answered calmly. “I would not suggest that you leave yet; you would lose yourself in the wilderness and we are a long way from your ship. If you truly want to return, I will take you back.”

“Yes! I want to go back.” the child spoke positively.

“Then I will keep my word. Jon, stay with Tymos, I will not be long and I will explain later.”

Still holding the child’s hand, she asked suddenly “What is your name?”

“Pyr,” the child replied without thinking then asked, “How can you see where you are going in here? It is so dark that I can see nothing.”

He was curious in spite of himself. Kryslie decided that was a good sign.

“I’ll show you,” Kryslie showed his mind what her eyes were seeing. Everything had a reddish tinge, brighter where the rock of the cave was warmer.

“Stand close to me,” Kryslie told him. He obeyed and Kryslie took him back to the alien ship. She wasted no time between stages and finally reached the darkness beneath the ship. There was light enough from the sunlight beyond the ship for the child to find his way, instead he shouted for the guards.

“Goodbye for now!” Kryslie told him softly and she was gone before the alerted guards came in answer to the summons.

Keleb was only vaguely conscious and moaning faintly.

Tymos lay both hands on him and opened himself up to feel his friend’s injuries. He felt an echo in his own body and from that sensation he decided Keleb had been beaten, possibly had concussion, and did have many acutely painful spots on his chest and back.

With his adjusted sight, Tymos began to examine Keleb – gently moving torn clothing aside to find patches of burnt skin. Some very impolite descriptions of the alien leader, Kellex, came to mind. He spoke a few aloud.

“What did that bastard want Keleb to tell him?” Jonko responded to Tymos’s curses.

“Probably he wanted to know more about us. Where we came from - in case there are more unpleasant surprises like us lurking somewhere.” Tymos spoke as he moved his hand down the length of Keleb’s prone body. He was using his hand as a focus to see the energy aura. Purple was normal for where there were no injuries, but little of Keleb’s aura was that colour. Most was reddish green, though one place was brilliant green, and looking at it made him feel nauseated. Tymos sat back, appalled. He normalised his eyes to do as he did when he wanted to see in the dark, but could still see the ‘mark’ as a glow when seen in light just into the UV range of the spectrum.

He wondered how to start helping Keleb. Kryslie had said he had a healing gift, and he had used it to help the old woman, Leonie, but that had been instinctive. At the time he had not realised he was doing anything. He had helped Kryslie with her shoulder, but again, that was different. She and he were closely linked. It was as if he was pain damping himself.

Tymos summoned power, surprised and relieved at the strength of the aura in the cave. He went to work. A pale mauve glow began to surround Keleb, appearing green where the wounds were worst. With one hand on Keleb’s forehead, he moved the other to touch the green glowing areas. His reaction when touching these areas was an arousal of an inner revulsion. He found it hard to master.

Keleb began to struggle against him.

“Kel, it’s me, Tymos. You are free and I am trying to help you.”

The struggling didn’t stop. “Kel, you are free. Lie still, I’m trying to help you.”

This time, Keleb lay quietly.

“Kel, I’m going to try something. Governor Reslic taught me to block pain. I am going to try to do that for you, okay?”

Very slowly, Keleb moved his hand to where Tymos was touching him.

“I take that as a yes,” Tymos said aloud and he once again allowed himself to feel Keleb’s pain, and began working to block it. He sensed when Keleb relaxed into sleep and paused then to consider his next move.

He reached out to touch where the green aura was brightest. Once again, touching it brought on a strong revulsion and he had to remove his hand.

His mind began to babble that he didn’t have enough power to remove the alien taint. He felt a flick of derision from his sister. “Kellex would like us to believe that! We have as much power as the Governor’s and he is an unweaned puppy.”

Tymos realised then that Keleb was not just physically wounded. “I’ll do what I can,” he told himself. “While Keleb is asleep, he won’t resist me.”

Working again, instinctively, Tymos drew on the aura and allowed it to flow back to the ground through Keleb.

He thought carefully of Keleb getting better, but nothing seemed to change. The reddish green areas stayed the same.

Oblivious to his sister’s return, Tymos only become aware of her when she knelt beside him.

“I’m not helping him,” Tymos thought in desperation.

Kryslie made her own examination. “Wanting him well is not enough. Kellex has made sure those injuries are well entrenched. Keleb is an empath, and I think, this was too much for his mind to bear. Or, that green area is stopping you. I...think I have seen something like that...with Sacul.”

Kryslie’s mind went to that area and she murmured, “I found I needed to find an analogy - a symbolic battle as a means to fight this unhealthy influence. Don’t try forcing the blight away - it will resist. Think of Keleb as he should be, as you want him to be, and pretend that what you are doing to him is worse than what has already been done.”

She sensed his moment of amazement at the suggestion, and then total comprehension. He let her do what she was doing, and acted on the suggestion - trusting her instinct. It seemed to him that her presence began the improvement for very slowly, as he sent his power into Keleb, the green glowing areas faded - replaced by mauve. Only the bright green area remained, and that seemed to be writhing within invisible hands.

He felt Kryslie's intention, not in thoughts or words or even images. In a form of communication that was deeper than mere telepathy, he linked to her mind, solidly shielding it, Keleb's and his own. He felt the glow as the writhing creature Kryslie envisioned it, was ready when she released her grip fractionally. The glow snaked around her arms, moving like it wanted to reach her head. Kryslie was fighting it, and she forced her arms down so her hands reached the ground. Tymos sensed her draining her power, and she slumped to the ground. The green glow writhed impotently, and gradually diminished until no trace remained.

Tymos reached over and nudged his sister.

"I'm fine," she answered his wordless question. "It's gone. And no, I don't know what it was, but it died when it thought that I had."

"You said it was like you felt in Sacul," Tymos prompted, standing and helping his sister up.

"Yes, and so much stronger. This is like a real tiger, when Sacul's problem was merely a picture of a tiger."

"We'll let Keleb sleep and regain his strength." Tymos suggested. He withdrew and went with Kryslie to where Jonko sat waiting at the cave entrance.

"I could not have done it without you," Tymos thanked his sister.

"Tym, I simply leant my strength to yours as the Governors once did for me. I offered advice because I could visualize why you were having trouble. You certainly had no trouble applying your gift once the psychic leech was impotent."

Tymos nodded an acknowledgement.

Jonko spoke from the darkness. "How is he?"

"Weak," Tymos told him. "His wounds are healed and Kryslie healed the shock to his mind. The aura is strong in here though, and that will help him regain his strength."

Jonko sighed with relief. "Perhaps now you might answer a question that has been puzzling me."

"What?" Kryslie asked.

"After you made such a point to catch that child, why did you let him go?"

"That child was our brother! As much as Llaimos is," Tymos said flatly, finding the confirmation in his sister's mind.

"Yes," Kryslie admitted. "I knew he had to be as soon as I set eyes on him. He felt to my senses, just like Tym does. He can't be more than nine or ten years old. He already he is a strong telepath, but I could not sense any power in him yet."

"Why take him back? Surely you can't leave him with the aliens- with the person who tortured Keleb?" Jonko objected.

"It is a risk," Kryslie admitted. "But at this time, he is not ready to accept the truth of our kinship. If we tried to keep him with us, he'd fight and try to escape. We can't watch him, tend Kel and avoid pursuit. The aliens have trained him and in their presence, he would betray us. He yelled for guards as soon as I got him back. Besides, I could not tell if his guardian, Kellex, has a way of tracking him."

"How likely is that? Kellex would not have expected you to get free and see him," Jonko continued to argue.

"It is more than that," Kryslie decided. "Kellex told us that he knew of a prophecy in which it is stated that three of father's children would stop them taking control of our world. However he got Pyr, and convinced father he was dead, I don't know. But he would not want to lose him."

“But, prophecies come from the Guardians,” Jonko insisted. “Surely the guardians would not help our enemies?”

“Other races might have foreseeers, Jon, but allowing that the Aeronites were once Tymorean, someone might have had a vision, meant to help the Aeronites, and not harm us – but the Aeronites interpreted the wrong way.”

“But it has meant,” Kryslie stressed the word, “That Kellex has either abducted or killed all of father’s children – until us. And he has kept the truth from Father.”

“Are there others?” Jonko wanted to know.

“Yes. I was mistaken for someone called Vila, a ward of Kellex, and that guard that fell on me was - is – the image of Tymos, only older by about ten years. Pyr called them his siblings.”

“I still think that if Kellex wants him so much, it’s more reason to take him away,” Jonko suggested.

“Pyr doesn’t know any other life. We’d be taking him from his siblings and the only one he knows of as a father. I don’t think I want him the target of Kellex’s anger,” Kryslie said thoughtfully. “I don’t like the idea either, but I think I got through to him.”

“How so?” asked Jonko.

“I made him curious, and I showed him another side to the power he recognises in his siblings.”

“How will that help? Wouldn’t that get him into trouble? What if he were missed?”

“It’s a risk, like I said. However, I am willing to bet that he won’t mention me to his guardian. He is a gentle child, and he saw the treatment Keleb received. It shocked him to think that his guardian was responsible. I know that his brother, Jordan, told him not to mention his telepathy to their guardian – ostensibly, to avoid a beating, but it might be that Jordan is trying to protect him from being used by Kellex. No doubt, Kellex justifies his actions by painting Tymoreans in a bad light, but I emphasised the wrongness of that by showing him mind pictures of Keleb with animals. Pyr might talk to Jordan about this, but I can’t see him saying anything to Kellex. I also used mind speech with him all the time and he did the same to me. For him, it’s a natural ability.”

“What if he was missed, and made to talk?” Jonko asked.

Tymos answered that. “They would not think he was with us long enough to be influenced. We gave him a shock too, but Krys took him back when he asked, just as we offered. So he knows we kept our word. I think he will hope no one realises anything happened. If I were him, I would say I escaped and ran off, and so look better in the eyes of his elders. ”

“What about the other two?”

“I didn’t see Vila, but I know Jordan is receptive to telepathy, and can sense his sister’s presence. However, I don’t think he uses telepathy,” Kryslie began. “He has Tymorean power – not surprisingly, and it seems to be roughly under control. We have no way of knowing how Kellex has trained him.”

“I don’t like it,” Jonko persisted. “It might be too late for the older two, but that child...”

“We’ll get him away from Kellex if we can,” Tymos promised.

“The older one saw you,” Jonko pointed out.

Kryslie gave a short laugh. “Kellex calls us children. Naturally, anyone older than us will think they are better than we are. I really detest that attitude, but it is to our advantage. In the last few moments I had before we left, I used my power to erase from his memory his psychic perception of me. He won’t remember me clearly except as the woman prisoner that escaped. He will not realize that I know what he is.”

“Are you going to tell your father?”

Jonko’s question was one they had not yet come to terms with.

“You will have to tell him. He has the right to know.”

“We will have to find the right time,” Tymos hedged. “I know you are right, Jon, but...”

“What? Why don’t you want to?”

“Jon, it isn’t easy,” Kryslie spoke for her brother. “Jordan probably doesn’t recall being anywhere else either. My impression of him is that he is an obedient ward, and he believes his guardian...”

“Brainwashed,” Jonko translated.

“That is not his fault,” Tymos insisted.

“I was in the same room with him,” Kryslie went on. “I didn’t get the sense of rogue power. However, I did feel that in some of the guards that were looking for us. I don’t want to hate Jordan or wish his power removed.”

“He has commander rank, though, and one day he will lead their armies to try to crush us,” Tymos admitted. “I don’t like that idea. How he goes about it would decide if he has become an enemy or not. He has to be intelligent, above average. Surely, he will come to see that conflict is wrong.”

“You two are damn idealists,” Jonko said with exasperation. “It could get you killed. If you don’t tell the Governors about this, as soon as possible, I will! And you will have to explain your feeble-minded notion to His Excellency.”

“Yeah,” Kryslie agreed sardonically.

“What I don’t like,” Tymos admitted. “Is what Kellex said about taking Llaimos and training him to lead his armies.”

“We need to get home,” Jonko blurted. “Urgently. If that Kellex has done what you said, Llaimos is not safe. He will not stop until your little brother is in his control.”

“And us?” Tymos suggested. “I’d say we royally aggravated him.”

“I don’t think he will try to warp you stubborn-minded mavericks. I will leave it to your imaginations what he will do.” Jonko warned them.

“Jon, you are right,” Kryslie admitted soberly. “I know Stenn is guarding Llaimos, but we do need to get home, and I don’t think we can afford to wait for help to find us. They don’t know where we are. At the same time though, I am reluctant to do so until Keleb has rested longer and regained his strength. We are a long way from home and we can only transmit in short stages. We can’t afford to be burdened with the need to protect Keleb; it halves our fighting strength. We can try to contact Father, though I am not sure of the limits of our telepathic gift.”

“Try it,” Jonko told them. “I’ll keep watch.” He turned his attention back to the outside.

“We should all go back closer to Keleb,” Tymos suggested. “The cave doesn’t end at the wall back there. Use your power to sense the coming of others. If you need to speak, touch one of us on the shoulder. We will need to concentrate.”

Jonko obeyed the suggestion and leant against the nearest wall. He heard only faint noises as Tymos and Kryslie adopted poses of meditation, which they maintained for half an hour.

Hands joined, sitting cross-legged in identical poses of meditation, Tymos and Kryslie faced each other, linked minds and sought to reach their father’s mind. They put everything into their summons, knowing that their father could send messages over long distances. They sensed no response, perhaps the High King slept. Finally, they drew apart and relaxed.

“We must find a way to tell our father what we have learnt.” Tymos thought at Kryslie.

Suddenly he tensed as Jonko’s hand touched his shoulder. Kryslie sensed his sudden change from relaxed to alert. People were approaching.

“Aliens?” Jonko asked softly.

“No!” Kryslie answered in a nearly inaudible voice. “Not aliens. Let them approach.”

Jonko crouched down beside them, all three were protecting Keleb.

The people came from both the passage deeper into the cave and from the passage from the track outside. They were armed with a mixture of crude and primitive weapons and weapons taken from the aliens. The approach was stealthy; and they knew their way without needing light. Jonko could not even perceive them except as a sense of living creatures. He knew that the

darkness was no hindrance to the eyes of his friends, so he waited, sensing that the beings had surrounded them.

Chapter 42 - Mutants

Suddenly, a ring of torches burst into flames, illuminating a ring of faces, and making all look like snarling gargoyles. Jonko inched back closer to the still sleeping Keleb. Tymos and Kryslie stayed as they were, making no threatening gestures. They observed the strangers, betraying neither fear, nor surprise, even though they recognised the array of odd shaped people as mutants.

If the mutant band intended surprise and intimidation, they quickly realized that the strangers were expecting them.

“You! Why here?” one of them grunted in the basic Tymorean dialect.

“Our friend was ill, he needs rest, and we sought shelter.” Kryslie spoke softly.

“Here, our place,” the same one grunted again.

“Our place, you go!” another spoke in a higher pitched voice.

“You go! You do not belong tribe!” a third distinct voice added. It was almost a growl.

A figure that had stood back beyond the ring of torches moved forward. Two of the torchbearers moved aside for him.

“Your friend bears slave mark!” the mutant that had just come forward now spoke in a clear even voice. Standing, he could see over their heads to where Keleb lay. “We are paid well for the return of slaves. We will take all of you.”

“We are not slaves!” Tymos said evenly, looking closely at the speaker, who was well formed, well spoken and showed no obvious mutation.

“The dark eyed ones will pay us well for the return of that one. And the rest of you – royals,” the mutant spat a glob of saliva in their direction. “We are to look for some who escaped our friends. We will give you to them too.”

“What harm have we done to you?” Jonko spoke up.

“You ask? Royals you are. Deny it not,” grunted one of the earlier speakers.

“Why else you here. Our place, this. Take for torture you will, if stop you we don’t.” That was the high-pitched speaker.

“Royals have done nothing for us, we owe you nothing. We owe the dark eyed ones much!” the clear spoken voice of the leader claimed. “Twelve of my tribe your kind took. Eleven now dead!”

Tymos watched the leader, as he thought at Jonko. “Jon, move slowly towards Keleb, be prepared to transmit on our instructions.”

Imperceptibly Jonko began to move but at the same moment, an energy bolt lanced from the mutant’s weapon. It just missed him and Keleb but was a blatant warning. Both Jonko and Tymos identified the weapon as Tymorean, and guessed it came from an ambushed Peace Corpsman.

Tymos also understood that that mutant leader was telepathic and he spoke again silently as he slowly stood up. “The dark eyed ones will use you as long as they want and then treat you as slaves. It is not in their nature to share the spoils of war.” His thought was forceful.

The mutant spoke in reply, not realizing that Tymos had not spoken aloud.

“Dark eyed ones promise us to remove tormentors. Too late for you it is. Dark eyed ones coming already. Want you they do. We look for you. We saw you come in and we signal them.”

“Do you know who we are?” Kryslie asked aloud, she had stood when the attention was on her brother.

“Enemies you are,” another voice stated.

“Personally, I don’t care. Four less accursed Royals will be no loss. Let your kin suffer like my tribe do.” The leader gestured for his men to encircle their prisoners.

“Father!” An indignant voice was clearly heard. A young mutant pushed his way through to the front. He had no distinctive colouration differences in the flickering torch light; nor did he resemble the man he called father, except that he had regular and undistorted features.

“You should care! They are the children of the High King.”

“And why would his accursedness let his precious whelps run loose in our place? Heh? Anything might happen to them. Why you think I tell you to stay with tribe?”

A loud babble of harsh and raucous laughs erupted.

The leader silenced the noise. “They do look like they might be what you say. Hair the colour of fire and all.”

He glared at his son. “How you know them?”

The young mutant looked down and scuffed his toes in the dust. “Xan was watching them. I went with him.”

He received a solid buffet on his shoulder. “Told you were, to keep away, boy!” gruff voice stated.

“Lucky you were, seen you weren’t. Know we do. Caught you was, dead you be now.”

“Fool boy!” the leader confirmed. “But now that we know this – we will demand more for them. Fair return. We find what our friends lost. The royals of government hunt us, like animals. Our friends hunt Royals. Get up. Rest of you we go meet friends.”

“Our friend is too ill to travel,” Kryslie said evenly, making no move to stand.

“Get up or we kill you,” the leader threatened.

“Dead captives are worth nothing,” Tymos stated calmly. He was ready to act, but appearing deceptively docile.

“Get up or we stun you,” another growled a threat.

Kryslie stood, casually. “We are not here to harm any of you,” she said quietly. “Your friend, Kellex, tortured our friend and he needs rest.”

“Fair deal,” gruff voice claimed. “Royals torture mutants.”

Tymos spoke with deliberate calmness. “Keleb tortured nobody. He was trying to rescue friends. He is an empath. Do you know what that means?” He saw blank expressions. “It means that he would have felt every pain he inflicted on another.”

“Too bad! My people tortured at Royal palace. They just try to help friends too.”

“Did they torture you?” Tymos asked of the leader. “You personally?”

“They had not begun yet.” The leader implied that they would have in time.

“You have them wrong!” Kryslie said gently. Memories came into her mind, of the High King and what he had tried to do. “They are not the barbarians that the dark eyed ones claim. They truly care about all the people on this world, even you. They tried to help the others by stabilizing their genetic make up. Yes, they failed with many - but your people could not accept the help. They willed their own death. And truly, they feel great sorrow at their failure.”

“I do not believe you!” the mutant told them. “They killed my people!”

“There is one way I can convince you,” Kryslie spoke again. “You have telepathic abilities; you heard my brother speak to our friend. Look into my mind and into my brother’s mind and read the truth.”

“I tried that and could not!” the leader claimed.

“If you are telepathic, try now; we are no longer shielded against you!” Kryslie urged. She wanted the mutants help.

Kryslie felt the mutant’s intrusion in her mind but did not flinch. Tymos felt his touch and the withdrawal.

“What you say is true!” the mutant admitted and it was a difficult admission to make. “I did not think it was possible. The dark eyed ones have made us many marvellous promises. It seems I have been a fool to believe them. It puts me in a difficult position. If I let you escape, they will punish us; they will kill some of the tribe in retribution.”

One of the other mutants spoke again, breaking the silence.

“Listen not. Liars they are!”

“Never have they helped us!” a second voice grated.

“Help us prison, help us dead!” a third muttered.

“Silence!” the leader spoke sharply and his followers obeyed.

“What sort of life can you offer us?” the mutant asked. “We are outlaws, mutants and dare not even show ourselves in civilized places? We cannot even breed true or consistently?”

“We can stabilize your genes, if you are willing to accept what must be done; it cannot succeed unwilling. If you help us, we will give our word that we will not act as the instruments of your death and we will treat you with the respect due to you by right as a Tymorean citizen.” Kryslie promised.

“Kill us they will.” A mutterer continued.

“With them we rule you!” came another voice.

“Give us guns, show you!” The words were accompanied by the firing of a paralysing ray, aimed at Kryslie. She deflected it harmlessly into the ground.

“Do that, how you?” asked the one who had fired the weapon and he reached out to grab her hand.

“You fool, Moreg!” the leader’s child spoke. “Do you really think that your precious dark eyed friends will treat you as an equal? They would not give you their most powerful weapons. They give you mere toys!”

“How you know? Prove you!” Moreg demanded.

“I don’t have to! You obey my Father! You obey him!” the child argued.

“I would like to know,” the leader asked his son.

“I tried to tell you father,” the child stated. “Xan, the young alien who rescued you, he never believed his elders promises; he knows they can’t abide the sight of us!”

“How can we help you?” the leader asked, making up his mind. “My people are yours to command.”

“We don’t have much time!” Tymos spoke up. “If you can take our friends, Jonko and Keleb, away from here before the aliens come and take a message to our father telling him where we are and where the dark eyed ones are based, you will be doing us a great service.”

“How many of you are telepaths?” Kryslie asked.

“Three of us here, but there are others in other tribes. We can send your message quickly. Will you let the dark eyed ones capture you again?”

“Yes, we escaped once and can do so again. We do not want them to suspect your loyalty.” Tymos stated briefly.

“Jon, leave now!” Kryslie broke in urgently. The mutant leader threw his weapon to Jonko who caught it neatly. It was another of the scout group’s weapons. These mutants must have taken these for themselves before the aliens had the chance. Jonko used the strap to loop it on his shoulder and leant over to lift Keleb. He followed the mutant designated by the leader.

“What is your message?” the leader asked.

Tymos worded it telepathically and the leader’s son quietly followed after Jonko and his escort.

“My son will send it and I will wait with you for them.” The leader watched as Tymos and Kryslie arranged themselves in a semblance of paralysis.

Chapter 43 - Recapture

With every instinct screaming at them to transmit away, Tymos and Kryslie disciplined themselves to stay. They covered their noses with a double fold of cloth and summoned the aura to form a layer of protection about themselves, and then tried not to think of the danger they were letting approach. The aliens had seen the extent of their power and would take no chances. Warlord Kellex wanted them off planet and disabled; neither must be allowed to happen. It was folly to lie there waiting.

Their premonitions proved correct. The aliens, knowing where their quarry was hidden, saturated the area with the stronger green aura force field. The effect was weaker within the cave as the natural aura was strong there.

Tymos and Kryslie felt its effects with trepidation but remained aware and were still able to think at each other. Then came a foul smelling gas that caused the mutants to slump to the ground unconscious. Kryslie and Tymos breathed shallowly through the folds of cloth, resisting the creeping feeling of lethargy. The mutants' torches had fallen to the ground and two were burning close to unconscious bodies. To keep their minds awake, Tymos and Kryslie drew energy from the flames causing them to die out. As they extinguished the last of the torches, four armour-clad aliens strode into the cave. They each wore a bright light on their helmets, and these flicked around the cave as they looked around. The lights all came to focus on what they thought were unconscious red haired children.

Since they had their eyes closed, the first either Tymos or Kryslie knew of the paralysing ray was when they felt a cold chill rushing along their length, followed by a loss of all sensation from neck down. They felt the chill stop, and peeped through almost closed eyelids. The aliens were giving the same treatment to the unlucky mutants.

"So much for friendship," Kryslie managed to think at her brother. Since she was still conscious, she drew on the aura to help her overcome the paralysing beam's effect.

Tymos warned her when one of the aliens returned.

She was aware when the alien leant down and spoke, "I know you are somehow still conscious, but I have a little something to make sure you give no trouble." She could not prevent him from pressing the orifice of an oddly shaped weapon to her neck. Within moments, her mind began to feel weird. She drew in yet more power and willed her mind to resist the effects of the drug. As her mind began to grey out, she knew Tymos was feeling the same and the aliens were now sure they would give no trouble.

Watching from the scant cover of some scrubby bushes, just down hill from the cave, Jonko watched the armoured aliens carry his friends like they were just two animal carcasses. Each of the aliens held either the hands or feet of their captives as they walked openly to their aircraft. These were the same type as they had used the previous night.

He had heard the aircraft approaching soon after leaving the cave. He had pushed Keleb into the nearest cover, and tried to hide himself nearby. He had a view of the aircraft, and he studied them while the aliens were inside the cave. He wanted to go closer, but dared not. He needed to protect Keleb, and his friends had seemed confident that they could handle themselves. After seeing what they had done – was it only yesterday – harnessing the power of that unnatural storm, he had to believe them.

The two captives were slung into the rear section of the nearest ship - not even tied up. That meant they had to be completely incapacitated. Jonko felt a shiver of disquiet. They would be able to overcome what ever drug or weapon that had been used on them, but what if they could not do it soon enough to prevent being taken off world? He wanted to go and help them.

Keleb groaned and tried to sit up.

“Keep your head down, Kel,” Jonko warned quietly. He didn’t take his eyes off the airship.

“What’s happening,” Keleb asked weakly.

Jonko gave a terse explanation.

“We have to help them,” Keleb insisted with as much force as he could gather. He tried again, unsuccessfully to stand. “That alien will kill them this time.”

“You can’t do anything, Kel. But now you are awake, I am going to transmit into that flutter. If I fail, you will be our last chance at rescue. The mutants have promised to get a message to the palace. But I don’t think help will get here in time.”

“Mutants?” Keleb quizzed Jonko, but his friend wasn’t listening. The airship doors were closing and the engine noise was increasing in pitch.

Quickly estimating distance, Jonko transmitted into the rear hold, stumbling on arrival as the craft began to roll forward. He found his balance and crouched beside Tymos who was trying to move. Jonko reached out and touched his friend, who reacted by turning his head to face him. Tymos’s eyes were unfocused, and the mind touch seemed strained. “Jon?”

“What can I do?” Jonko asked, and it seemed an eternity until Tymos touched his mind again.

“Use our transmitters,” Tymos managed to think. His thought sounded groggy.

“They took them,” Jonko said quickly.

“Stop us flying,” Tymos forced out, trying to overcome his foggy mind. “Drive engines – behind wall – cut power – stop the force field – transmit down.”

Kryslie was slowly inching her way nearer Tymos. Jonko saw the strain of the effort on her face as he adjusted the beam of the mutant’s weapon to its hottest and narrowest setting. He wasted no time starting to burn through the metal wall. As soon as he could, he peeled back the metal, ignoring the searing heat on his unprotected hands. He received an image from Tymos and aimed the weapon at the vital engine workings. He turned back and crouched next to his friends, adjusted his transmitter, to cover all of them. He then felt Tymos and Kryslie touching him and adding power to the unit; he imaged down – and activated it.

They dropped the last ten feet, hitting the ground with a solid thud. Jonko rolled to look at the direction of the low flying airship. Its engine sounded like it was about to cut. Just before it disappeared over the horizon, the craft exploded into a huge fireball.

“That fixes that!” Jonko said aloud, and his mind quickly turned to his friends. He was relieved to see they were looking at him, even if they were unable to talk to him. “We’re too exposed here. Are you two all right? Will you be able to move?”

“Give us a little while,” Kryslie sent to his mind. Her mind was clearing. “Between the gas, the paralyzing ray and the mind boggling drug – a ten year old could tie us in knots. At least we are out of that green aura field.”

“What about the fall? I miscalculated. They came in low, but went out a bit higher,” Jonko babbled the apology.

“Jon. It’s okay. We didn’t break anything. Just winded ourselves. Luck that – it pushed the last of the gas from our lungs. Help us up, will you?” Tymos urged his friend.

“But the paralysis – it won’t have worn off yet.” Jonko said with concern.

“We’ll be able to walk in a little while,” Tymos assured him. “Help me up and help Kryslie to me.”

Jonko obeyed, feeling both of his friends trembling with effort. His own hands were extremely painful, but when he gripped Tymos to help him up, he felt blessed coolness. As Tymos used him for support, Jonko looked at his blistered hands. The blisters had gone and the redness was fading.

“You didn’t need to do that, Tymos. I’ll be fine, and you need all your strength.”

“I need yours,” Tymos argued. “We can walk, if you can support us.”

Jonko accepted the prognosis.

“Head off a bit to the left of east,” Kryslie urged.

“Shouldn’t we go undercover?” Jonko suggested.

“Yeah, but trust me,” Kryslie agreed. “We won’t have to go far.”

With a shrug, Jonko did as directed. He needed all his strength to keep his friends upright, so he asked no more questions. He moved from sand to scoured rock, and thought briefly that they were lucky to have landed on the softer ground.

Tymos and Kryslie were able to do little more than move one foot forward and then the next. Jonko was concerned by the slow pace, especially when he began to hear the sounds of more aircraft. He watched the sky alternately with placing his feet carefully. It was too dark to spot the aircraft, but they were very near.

“Damn,” he swore silently.

To his surprise, mutants appeared, seemingly out of the ground barely a few lengths away. Hand signals and soft grunts from the mutants indicated that he should follow. When the mutants realised that his friends were weak, two squat but solid males wearing clothing like sacks tied at the middle, came closer and lifted Tymos and Kryslie and began to trot back to the inconspicuous rock chasm they had appeared from. Jonko followed them, hoping to stay out of sight of the aircraft.

“Here safe. Help coming,” he was told tersely as they went deeper into the rock passage. At the end was a wider area, still not very big, but a small amount of light came from several banked fires nearby. The mutants lay Tymos and Kryslie down gently onto beds of springy fronds and then disappeared as suddenly as they had appeared.

Commander Nairo allowed a servant to transmit him to President Reslic’s office. Reslic was staring at a screen with a feed from the Jacen Tyr. The Captain was reporting.

“... no signs of a grounded ship in the near hills...”

Reslic, aware of Nairo’s arrival, gave him a glance and returned his attention to the space fleet officer. When the report was finished and the connection closed, Reslic asked Nairo for a report.

“Your Excellency, my men captured a mutant - early this morning- out near the forest. He was in their camp when they woke. He claims to have a message for His Majesty, but that was all we could get him to say. He has a terrible speech impediment.”

“Was he carrying weapons?” Reslic asked.

“No, sir, and no sign of any dangerous substances. He just walked up to one of my squads and demanded to come here and talk to Governor Tymoros. We thought him addled. The mutants usually don’t want to talk to us.”

“Where is this mutant now?” Reslic demanded.

“We have him in an isolation cell, Sir. He also has a highly odorous body smell. Captain Armon is guarding him.”

Reslic gestured to his unobtrusive attendant. Yeven approached silently.

“Give Governor Tymoros word of this, and bring him to the isolation cells.”

Reslic transmitted to the observation room next to the isolation cell. He studied the mutant, and betrayed nothing of his inner reaction to the short man with his gargoyle like face and twisted body. The poor creature, poor man, was not responsible for his looks. He half expected the mutant to be condescendingly arrogant – especially if the mutants were allied to the aliens who thought themselves so powerful. He was wrong. The mutant was visibly trembling, and cowering behind a chair on the opposite side of the room from Armon.

Tymoros arrived and walked to observe the prisoner. Aldiv stood back by the wall.

“He wanted to talk to me?” Tymoros remarked, studying the terrified mutant. “His message must be important, to come here voluntarily. I will talk to him.”

The mutant saw the red haired man arrive from nowhere and tried to get further behind the chair. With eyes scanning the room for possible escape, the mutant noticed the newcomer settling himself into one of the two chairs and gesturing to the other.

Tymoros concentrated on seeming non-threatening and spoke quietly and calmly. "I am Piyani Tymoros, High King Governor. You are welcome to sit if you wish. Can I offer you a drink?"

The gargoyle shook his head and stayed partly in hiding.

"I understand you have a message for me," Tymoros asked.

The mutant bobbed his head. He was almost rigid with fright. He had heard too many horror stories about what the royals did to his kind. But he had promised to bring the message, and he began to speak, stuttering violently.

"Th... Th... This me... me... message i... is f... for T... T....Tym...or...ous, H... High K... King" the man began. "C... can I t...tell you m... mind to m... mind?"

"Go ahead," Tymoros invited, accepting the implication of the mutant's request. He unshielded his mind and received the message, exactly as it had been spoken; no flaws in the wording had occurred through out the entire telepathic relay.

"Tell the High King that we are prisoners of the dark eyed ones who are Aeronites. They have captured us for a second time and we may not be able to escape so easily this time. They will try to take us off world and we will do all in our power to delay them. Jonko and Keleb are free in sector six-five and the alien ship is in sector seven-four. The mutants are now our allies and will lead you to Jonko and Keleb and the alien ship." The mutant went on to repeat a string of numbers that were the coordinates for the cave Tymos and Kryslie had met the mutants.

Tymoros sensed Reslic's wordless, "I'm on it." He concentrated on trying to ease the mutant's fears. He could help them a lot more than by merely being a messenger, if he chose.

"I am grateful to you, Sir. May I have your name?"

"T...t...ureg," the mutant stammered, looking suspiciously at the High King.

"Tureg, thank you. Your news both gladdens and saddens me. Is there something that I might provide for you and your people in return?"

With a headshake, the mutant used telepathy to make his reply. "To receive gifts, I did not come. Bring gifts, others want, make new friends, new enemies. Better without, home be rather."

"I will have you escorted back to where you met our Peace Corps officers. Will that do?"

"Yes, do well, go now?"

Tymoros rose, summoned Armon, and gave instructions. The Guard Captain escorted the mutant out.

Keleb, from his hidden vantage point, heard the sound of airplanes – jet planes, his mind whispered. A flight of three flew over him, heading in the direction the alien ship had gone. He didn't know if they were alien ships, or Tymorean. He had heard mention of a Tymorean Space fleet, but not an air force.

He had no idea if Jonko had succeeded in rescuing Tymos and Kryslie and he was worried. He tried to stand up, but he felt incredibly weak. He would not be able to walk anywhere and he was vulnerable where he was.

With his mind worrying about his friends, and being helpless, it was a while before he noticed, the gentle nudges on his legs. When he finally did, he jumped slightly, causing two of the hopper creatures to withdraw a few feet and stare at him.

"Hey, little ones, I didn't mean to frighten you," he said quietly. He held out his hand and let them inch forward to sniff him.

The creatures came closer and sat on their haunches, and then balanced on hind legs, with forelegs on his leg. They looked into his eyes. He hid the thoughts of this being strange behaviour for the creatures. They had come up to him before, to sniff him and occasionally some let him pat them, but never like this.

He stared back at the creatures, keeping his body still, and a vision came into his head. He saw an open area, rocky ground, a crack in the rock with a sense of 'deep', and then a sense of 'humans'. This stayed in his mind for a time and was then replaced by a second scene – of a narrow rocky path, leading down through rock to an open area – like a cave, but with a narrow line of sunlight through it. Again there was the sense of 'humans'.

“Where?” Keleb tried to ask the creatures, but they suddenly took fright and hop-ran away.

Keleb stood unsteadily, realised he wasn't alone, turned and almost fell over. Relief flooded through him as he realised that the Governors had arrived behind him. When he tried to bow, in the traditional greeting, he almost toppled. Xyron gripped him gently.

“Foster father,” he greeted, grateful for the strong arms supporting him, and the sense of energy filling him.

“Where are Tymos and Kryslie, and Jonko?” Xyron asked, with a tone of urgency.

Chapter 44 - Rescue

Keleb told what little he knew, that Tymos and Kryslie were recaptured and taken off in a flying craft and Jonko had transmitted into the ship to free them. He finished by saying, "The aircraft went east."

"I will try to reach them," Tymoros stated. Reslic looked around, alert for trouble. He hadn't liked Keleb's mention of mutants, even though one of that kind had told them how to find this place.

"What happened to you, Keleb, after you went off in the night?"

"Jon and I went off after the abductors and saw them put Tymos and Kryslie into one of the ships. There were six small ships landed not far away. Tymos sent us direction and distance and a picture of where the pilot was going. Jon followed, and I waited to see why the last two ships stayed. The crew returned carrying heavy equipment. I followed Jon, caught up with him near morning, since we had to transmit in stages to get to the place. They had Tymos and Kryslie out in the open under a glowing green force dome, but also heavily guarded."

"Outside," Reslic considered aloud.

"Yes, sir, Jonko thought they were checking to see if you could find them."

"What did you do?" Xyron directed Keleb back to the main narrative.

"I remembered Tymos saying about the missing scout group. I thought they might be near by, so I went to see if I could find them. As soon as it got light, I saw the top of a glowing white dome above the trees and went to see what it was. People – aliens – just walked through it, so I did too. There was a huge ship there, a squat shape of dull grey metal. The front half was sitting on the ground, and the back half was supported on struts, and there was enough room under it to walk upright."

"Did you get inside?" Xyron asked.

"Yes, I overcame one alien and took his clothes to put over mine. I went in but didn't see very much, and then I thought I sensed..."

"Go on," Xyron urged.

"I'm not really sure, but I was drawn down to what I think was the security section. I think I felt some of our people, but ..." Keleb realised he had no memory of events after then. "I can't remember now. I was caught, I think. And then I woke up here with Jonko."

"We had word that Tymos and Kryslie had met up with mutants," Reslic said quietly.

Keleb shook his head. "Jonko mentioned mutants, and that Tymos and Kryslie had agreed to let the aliens get them again..."

Gentle nudges distracted Keleb again. The hoppers were back.

"What do the little creatures want?" Xyron asked quietly, so as not to scare the creatures.

Keleb crouched again, and looked at the creatures. The scenes were the same. He didn't understand the importance, but thanked the creatures and stood again. "They are just giving me two images of a place, but I cannot tell where it is or what it means." He tried to find words to describe the scenes.

"It seems they want you to go to those places," Xyron suggested.

"I don't understand," Keleb admitted.

"The hopper creatures are able to communicate any danger they sense to others of their kind. Normally, as you know they are very timid, but at least one of them must have learnt that one of our kind was in danger or in trouble. In you, they sensed a kinship with them and tried to warn you in their own fashion," Xyron explained. "If we can learn where that place is, I believe we will find your foster cousins."

"Xyron, we are being watched," Reslic warned. He was calm, as if the threat was not great.

Xyron, who was nearest Tymoros, nudged his fellow Governor, breaking his concentration. They both unobtrusively drew weapons before turning to face the same direction as Reslic was.

“Come out, child, we will not hurt you,” Reslic invited.

The leaves of one particular squat leafy bush stopped moving. A very pale face pushed out from amongst the leaves, and red eyes stared at the three adults, as if comparing them to a memory. The child that emerged was visibly trembling.

“Promised us they did, to help!” the child slipped into the common dialect of the mutants. “Promise we did, them to help. Them your kin. Honour pledge you!”

“I will honour all pledges made in my name and by my kin,” Tymoros spoke, his soft voice positive. He made a gesture and the three Governors holstered their weapons and drew their flowing robes to hide them.

“What did you want to tell us?” Tymoros prompted, looking at the child’s pale features and realizing what he was.

“I heard you call to them!” the child began. “My father heard you call them. He can tell you where your kin are if you can help him. It is a sacred place of our tribe.” The child had recovered some of his confidence and switched from the mutant dialect, which was a simplification of the main Tymorean dialect, to the pure form.

“Where is your father, child?” Tymoros asked urgently.

“Follow me!” The child ran back towards the hill. The Governors followed at a trot, filled with a sense of urgency. They crossed the flat flood plain and saw the path leading up to the dark hole in the hill. When the child went straight in, they followed more cautiously, with weapons ready. The afternoon sunlight only reached a short way in, but it was enough to see the nearest prone mutant.

Tymoros continued in, as he could see well in the dark, and when he felt the strength of the aura he drew on it and the walls of the cave began to glow faintly. He saw the child squatting near one of the unconscious figures, and while Xyron examined that figure, he checked the condition of all the others. Reslic watched from the cave entrance.

Xyron knelt down beside the mutant leader and touched his forehead. The man flinched involuntarily, but moments later he began to move as the paralysis left him.

He inched up into a sitting position and tried to back away.

“Am I to be your prisoner again? I owe you thanks, but ...I have no wish for your hospitality again...I will fight you if I must to protect my people.”

Xyron assured him, “These of your people will recover in an hour or two.”

“Ah...why are you here?” the mutant dared to ask.

“Your son requested our help, and told us that you could help me locate my children,” Tymoros explained. “You know who I am.”

“Yes, and your children convinced me you meant no harm, but I cannot forget...but, ah...if I tell you where to find your missing ones...will you leave?”

“If that is your wish,” Tymoros agreed with a slight nod of his head.

“Not all of my people trust your kind, even though I have placed us at the command of your kin. Still, it does not matter; they will obey me. I learnt from the leader of a neighbouring tribe that your kin escaped from the thing that flies and were directed to a safe place. If you come back outside I will show you the way.”

Out in the daylight, the mutant followed a barely discernable track to the top of the mountain. He stopped and pointed to two distant peaks.

“There is a pass between the twin peaks, the road from there leads down onto wide plains. A guide will wait for you there to guide you further. He is leaving his village now and will be there in moments.”

“I am in your debt,” Tymoros acknowledged. “I do not know your name.”

“My name is Mithas,” the mutant admitted. “You owe me nothing. I pledged to help your kin, that my people may earn their help.”

“You will have it!” Tymoros promised.

“We will earn it!” Mithas said sharply. “I must return to my tribesmen and wait for them to wake.”

Mithas and his son walked away from the Governors and Keleb. When they were out of sight, Reslic transmitted the remaining four people to the distant location. Reslic had a transmitter a great deal more powerful than the one Keleb had lost.

As promised, the guide was waiting; a squat, well-muscled mutant with a strangely shaped face. He was a parody of the normal human form and clad in a shapeless brown tunic. Yet the Governors felt in him the same telepathic awareness that the mutant leader Mithas had possessed. The guide was startled by their unannounced arrival and was clearly nervous.

From the pass, the high plains were visible and not featureless. The mutant gave their next coordinate.

“If good your eyes, marks you see beyond river,” the guide began. “Brown, growing not. Centre one, rock hollow. Find you they will!”

Tymoros acknowledged the reference with a slight bow, making no mention of the fact that the mutant carried an alien weapon. Reslic had been studying it as the man had been talking. He said nothing aloud and kept his thoughts shielded.

The mutant backed away after giving his message but he did not go far. He watched with fascination as the Governors vanished.

On the ground, the plain seemed featureless as they materialized on a rock platform; the surroundings apparently deserted. The Governors sensed the nearness of mutants and of their own kind and scanned the area. The first indication of life came when a head appeared from the ground a mere six feet away; they had seen no sign of a hole.

The mutant turned and looked at them.

“Come you have, here open. Come.” This mutant was like a rock carving, but he had that spark of telepathic awareness.

The Governors walked to where the head had again disappeared and saw the narrow chasm that they could only enter in single file. Keleb coming in last saw the place that the hoppers had visualized. They had known of this place on the other side of a mountain range! A hopper skittered past his feet and he knelt down to attempt to reach its mind. Several mutants watched with open-mouthed amazement as the hopper turned and hopped back towards the royal stranger. Keleb maintained a silent communication for a few minutes then released the hoppers mind. As the hopper moved back to its hole, Keleb moved thoughtfully and walked to where the Governors were kneeling beside the resting figures of his friends. Jonko came to him.

“You are looking well again foster brother,” Jonko spoke casually, noting Keleb’s look of preoccupation.

“I am well, as I should be,” Keleb answered. “Yet I have a sense that some of our kinfolk are not.”

“Tymos and Kryslie will be well,” Jonko misunderstood Keleb’s concern. “Though they were weakened after bringing you back from death’s edge. I was afraid they would be incapacitated by the alien’s treatment for much longer.”

Keleb was distracted, trying to make sense of the new vision he had received from the hoppers.

“Fire in the sky,” he murmured. Then he answered Jonko’s comment.

“I don’t fear for our friends, but for... Was I that close to death?”

Jonko nodded. “Yes! Why?”

Keleb shook his head as if to wake up. “Then perhaps there will be time to save them!” Keleb brushed past Jonko and ran the short distance to where Tymos lay.

The Governors had gone to where the mutants had made beds for Tymos and Kryslie. Jonko had been curtly dismissed as Tymoros and Xyron leant over the almost comatose

children. Reslic stood guard, carefully observing all around him and ready to lend his power if needed. It seemed that just the proximity of the Governors had roused the children. Kryslie opened her eyes and struggled to sit up.

“Father!” she said weakly but with obvious relief. “They used their paralysing ray and one of their filthy drugs.”

“It would seem that they were taking no chances,” Tymoros remarked helping her to stand. “However the drug is almost fully metabolized and your power prevented the paralysing ray from having all but a slight effect. The residual stiffness will go if you walk around for a time. Why did you let them capture you again?”

“Father, it was the only way to prevent the aliens from learning that the mutants were now our allies. They learnt that we were stronger than they expected, but now they will think we are still vulnerable and not develop stronger weapons to use against us.”

Kryslie, walking with Tymoros, noticed Keleb approach Tymos who was only just standing unsteadily, and being supported by Xyron.

“Tymos, you must help them!” Keleb was saying urgently.

“Help who, Kel?” Tymos asked, trying to comprehend what Keleb was meaning.

“The scout party, I think. I saw...” Keleb stopped speaking, but was projecting a vivid mental picture.

The picture was of a brilliant flash, an all-prevalent sense of burning, and a darkening of the sun. A face, a Tymorean face and a long view of the body dressed in tattered brown clothing.

Tymos gave a sharp intake of breath and drew in a surge of power that let him throw off the residual effects of the alien’s treatment. The hopper vision had been vivid.

“I may be able to help some of them,” Tymos said catching Keleb’s urgency. He sent Kryslie the image as he went to Reslic.

“The alien ship, it blasted off,” Tymos told the Governor.

“Yes,” Reslic confirmed. “It is as well that you were not on it.”

Tymos ignored the rebuke. “Kel got a vision of bodies, near where the ship was. I can take you there.”

Reslic activated a communicator, listened to a report, and gave terse orders.

“We sent a flight of jets to overfly the coordinates that your new allies gave us. They engaged some of the enemy craft, before those craft turned spaceward. All that is left where the big ship was is a huge charred area.”

Tymos glanced at Keleb and saw his tortured expression. “We need to go to the site. Some may still be alive.”

Kryslie had also thrown off the last of the alien drugs. She went to Keleb, aware of the mental torment of his returning memories, and the sense of failure in being unable to help the missing Tymoreans.

“It’s not your fault, Kel. You tried to save them,” Kryslie willed Keleb to believe her. “If you must blame anyone, blame that Kellex. He is an evil fiend. I will not forget what he did to them, and to you.”

She sensed Keleb’s nausea as he recalled being tortured.

“They wanted to know about you,” Keleb whispered.

“It’s over, Kel, and we are alright, and so will you be. We will settle with Kellex later, Help us now...”

Kryslie held onto Keleb and drew him closer to Xyron and Tymoros. Tymos gave Reslic the coordinates to the edge of the forest, near where the alien ship had been.

Kellex exalted at the report relayed to him by the mutants. The ugly ones had caught the obscene whelps of the High King – the foolish, infantile, know-it-alls. When he had them again, they wouldn’t escape. He would take the ship into space and see if they could escape from there – if they survived long enough to try.

He sent for one of his elite aircrews, and considered how to have his revenge for the humiliations those whelps had inflicted on him.

While he waited for the crew to report, he gave orders to prepare the ship to lift, and to have all his team leaders report to him for interim assignments. His second-in-command arrived promptly to oversee the take off preparation, and Kellex ordered him to recall all the aircraft.

The elite aircrew arrived and Kellex gave details instructions for the handling of the prisoners captured by the mutants. He wanted the whelps thoroughly helpless, and his mind was full of malicious delight when he specified the procedures. As an after thought, he warned his crew to be alert – someone had helped to free them before. If they caught anyone trying to free the whelps, that traitor was to have the same treatment.

Then his team leaders either reported in person or via communicator. Those still in the field were told to dig in and await further instructions. Some of the teams on rest cycle were told to terminate the slaves and dump the bodies outside.

The time waiting for the crew to confirm that they had the prisoners, seemed interminable. He paced the bridge of his command ship and snapped at the crew. His own boasts of being able to neutralise all the High King's whelps were haunting him. He needed success – now!

Some of the other Warlords were making snide comments amongst themselves, and his ranking within the council of Warlords was in the balance. Those other warlords didn't believe him about the High Kings offspring. They all thought his old mentor had been senile or hallucinating when he had foreseen the actions of the red headed whelps.

All his fears dissolved when the aircrew reported success and gave an estimated return time of twenty minutes.

In exactly that time, Kellex strode down to the docking deck to wait...and wait...

"Where is that aircraft?" he roared at the flight controller. "Contact it!"

A shiver of dread slithered down his neck, when the call went unanswered.

"Have another aircraft overfly the area between here and that mutant cess pit," Kellex ordered.

The flight commander obeyed at once, activating one of the just refuelled craft.

Kellex began to pace the docking deck until the flight commander approached again.

"Warlord, Sir. Wreckage was observed at coordinates....Blackened fragments are spread over a wide area, suggestive of an explosion."

"Send out a salvage crew," Kellex directed, hiding his anger. "Look for bodies."

He strode back to the command deck, hoping that the two whelps were dead, but hearing in his mind an insidious voice that was telling him they had escaped again.

"How?" He demanded of that voice. Had one of the four-man crew been a traitor? Had some Tymorean been immune to both the gas and the green force field? Had one or more of the mutants...no, they hated the royals. How?"

He paced the bridge, considering his options. He had to know if those whelps were alive. Yes! That was it! His little toy. What was his name? Scary? Zacary? The perfect use for that creature. Odds on, as soon as they could, those whelps would be dragged back to the estate. His toy would surely get to hear of it.

Kellex went to his command chair and adopted a semblance of relaxation. He reached out with his mind and found his toy, and relished how the creature hated his mental touch, but could do nothing about it.

"Where are the elder Prince and the Princess?" he asked his creature, and wasn't surprised to hear they were apparently still on tour with the king.

"Can you get to the young Prince?" Kellex asked. He was less pleased to hear that his creature was being watched, and the baby was well protected, even at night.

“Who protects it?” Kellex asked. This time he sensed his creature was angry about something, and he demanded to know why.

“The President’s whelp?” Kellex mused. “You and he don’t like each other...I can teach you how to get back at him.”

Kellex almost laughed when his toy revealed all his stored up resentment, and wanted to know how to get the Reslic whelp in trouble.

When he finally freed the mind of his toy, the creature had his instructions, and was anticipating sweet revenge on Stenn Reslic.

In a much better mood, Kellex gestured to his second-in-command and ordered, “Send Xan to me.”

When that message had gone, Kellex requested a progress report on the countdown to launch. That report satisfied him.

Xan arrived, his uniform regulation neat, and he was eager for instructions. He bowed correctly and waited.

“The royal brats escaped again. The plane I sent to get them, crashed on the way back and the crew are probably dead. Go and talk to your mutant friends and find out if they saw any other people around who might have helped the escape. I want to know who helped them, and I want to know where those brats are. I am certain that they got away. I want them found before the Governors find them. The brats need to learn respect for others and I intend to teach them.”

“If they are smart they will head straight back to the palace, Sir,” Xan suggested.

“If they are smart. My little toy reckons they were only looking for a chance to escape the estate. They were not raised to be obedient little children, but came from off world or were raised in some isolated place. If you are quick, you should be able to find them. You are to take control of two squads - one from here and one that is at camp epsilon. Take whatever weapons and communications gear that you think you will need. I will be lifting the ship very soon, so you will need to report to Zorrex in the northern base. If you can’t keep them alive and controlled, you must kill them.”

“Yes, Sir,” Xan agreed crisply. His first reaction was pride and elation at being given such an important task and he kept that thought in his mind to hide his second reaction. He didn’t like the idea of killing children.

“The squads, the rest of the gear and horses will be at camp epsilon – go at once.”

Xan was just leaving when the emergency klaxon began its raucous noise. The message blared into a pause. “Enemy aircraft approaching, vector seven theta. Eta 10 minutes.”

“Get going!” Kellex snapped at Xan. “You have three minutes to get off this ship before it launches.”

Xan trotted off, and was almost bowled over by Commander Jordan, one of Kellex’s wards.

“Action stations,” Kellex bellowed into the comm. “Start take off sequence now.”

To Jordan, Kellex directed, “Tell all the ships that are not docked to prepare for space rendezvous at location beta. They are not to engage the enemy.”

Jordan went to a console and began to send the orders. In a short time, he was able to report that all teams had responded. Kellex merely grunted.

“Where are those craft from, Sir?” Jordan dared the question.

“Never mind where!” Kellex snarled. “They are Tymorean aircraft. Keep track of them. We need five minutes to lift and make space.”

Kellex was too busy with the necessary strategic retreat to ponder where the aircraft had come from. They shouldn’t even be here. Not once in the twenty years he had been observing this world had he seen aircraft. They were unknown quantities.

Despite Kellex’s ranting, the ship took longer to be ready than he demanded. As soon as all the console lights turned green, he gave the command to launch. By then, the Tymorean aircraft had arrived and they knew exactly where to aim. “Defence screens holding,” Jordan reported. He

was exhilarated by this first piece of action. “The enemy are veering off.” A few minutes later, he said, “Our aircraft are being attacked.”

“Tell those fool pilots to follow orders,” Kellex told Jordan as he ran to his command chair and strapped in for launch. “And those pilots are to report to me when they rendezvous – if they survive their idiocy.”

Kellex watched tensely as his planes turned upwards and made for space. The Tymorean craft were slow to follow and stopped pursuit at the edge of the atmosphere.

“They can’t follow,” Kellex crowed. He stopped speaking as the juddering of the initial lift phase gave way to increasing acceleration.

Far below the rapidly rising space ship, trees flattened by their landing and pushed into the ground were now burning furiously, and the trees around the site were singed and smouldering.

Chapter 45 - Aftermath

Grasses and trees were blackened and smouldering where the drive jets of the alien spacecraft had spewed fire during the emergency blast off. Tymos had given a vivid picture coordinate of the edge of the forest. The full desolation of the scene emerged as they turned around. The smell of burning trees, scorched rock and burnt flesh was overwhelming. Everything within range of the emergency thrusters was blackened.

Underneath where the spaceship had rested, were blackened heaps and burning trees. Strangely untouched bodies were visible on the side of the clearing away from the blast. Tymos, with Kryslie close behind him, ran towards these briefly touching each before moving to the next. There were close to fifty bodies not burnt beyond recognition but none remained alive. They shared a sense of failure at arriving too late to help the members of the lost third scout party.

Kryslie began to get a sense of aliens' warped power. Tymos shared her awareness and began to scan the edges of the forest. The Governors drew their weapons as the sense of alien watchers grew stronger; they were in dangerously open ground. Jonko and Keleb had instinctively moved to protect Tymos and Kryslie from the rear.

Kryslie turned to pinpoint the aliens that she had sensed and her arms that had been hanging loosely at her sides began to come together. Tymos was moving in an identical fashion but facing a slightly different direction. Suddenly they both stiffened; arms now stretched out together. From two directions, two powerful beams had been fired at them and the beams were perfectly deflected!

One had been reflected into the forest where came a scream of agony, the other into the sky where an explosion occurred and an alien flitter appeared, now devoid of its field of invisibility.

The explosion should have blown the ship into a million pieces, but a powerful force held it together and gently lowered it to the ground in front of Jono Reslic. Xyron examined the flitter recognizing its type and memorizing all relevant details. Tymos and Kryslie both used their new perception to scan it and when they encountered the alien pilot did not linger to examine him but withdrew their minds and walked to the edge of the forest.

Jonko and Keleb had followed their friends to the source of the agonized screams - two aliens, one with an arm gone and the other with part of his leg missing where the deflected disintegrator beam had struck, both were in severe pain.

Tymos approached the injured aliens and briefly touched the first and deadened his pain. When he touched the second one, he quickly withdrew his hand. Kryslie was startled by the sudden movement.

"Brother, what is wrong?"

"This one is not alien!" Tymos stated bluntly, his mind showing clearly what he had sensed. Kryslie touched the man herself and then quickly checked his eyes. "He is one of ours with the alien taint!" Kryslie agreed, as she blocked the man's pain, which was affecting the sensitive Keleb.

She turned to find that her father had come up to them.

The High King looked down at the man lying beside Tymos's crouched form. His face hardened and his children realized he was coming to terms with an unpleasant truth.

"Who is he father," Tymos demanded.

"Nabeth, a minor member of the House of Reslic." Tymos spoke quietly. "Many years before you came here he left the estate for the City of Isean; he had only the barest minimum of power."

Tymoros turned away from Tymos and looked to where Reslic was still controlling the alien flitter. Reslic had raised the flitter high into the sky again and then released his hold. The delayed explosion vaporized it.

Xyron and Reslic came to the forest in answer to a summons from Tymoros. Reslic, warned of what he would see, betrayed no expression. He probed the man's mind for himself and saw the signs of alien indoctrination. There was a brief flare of anger.

"How many more of our people have they warped?" he spoke aloud. "He was my friend when I was a child."

A memory came unbidden into the minds of Tymos and Kryslie. The Governors, lightly in rapport with them, picked up the image. Tymoros went pale.

"Who are they?" he demanded fiercely of his children.

"The child is Pyr," Kryslie began. "The man is Jordan and the woman is Vila. I did not see her, but I was mistaken for her!"

"Father?" Tymos said softly, concern in his voice. The High King had firmly shielded his thoughts and both Xyron and Reslic returned his glance impassively.

Kryslie walked to where she could touch her Father's arm.

"Father, there is hope that Pyr will not turn against us and Jordan who is a Commander, is less powerful than I."

Tymoros put an arm around Kryslie.

"How..." Tymos started to ask but he did not complete his question, from the look on his father's face he knew he would not answer - not at this time. So instead of asking questions, he joined his sister in embracing the man they now looked on as their father, and giving him silent understanding and sympathy.

After a moment, during which Tymoros controlled his mind, and grief and anger, he murmured, "Why? Why did they do this to my children?"

"Father, this does not justify the reasons, but Kellex, the alien leader, claims that one of theirs was gifted with a prophecy - that three of your children would ruin their plans. I intend to prove it a true vision," Tymos stated.

"And if it was indeed a prophecy," Kryslie considered, "Then the aliens interpreted it wrongly."

During the brief exchange, Xyron had summoned attendants and guards from the Royal Estate. The injured aliens were taken prisoner, to be treated and questioned. The bodies of the scout party would be returned for identification and funeral rites.

Tymoros released his children, grateful for their unconditional support. "It is time you both returned to the estate."

Both Tymos and Kryslie took a step away from their father, and straitened their posture.

"No!"

Kryslie moved to stand beside her brother as he faced the stern looks of the three Governors.

Both had seen such looks before - but this time they both knew what they had to do. They met the glares without backing down.

"Explain," Reslic snapped at them.

Tymos began to speak, knowing that he must convince his elders or be dragged home in disgrace.

"Sir, the Elders said, some months ago, that we must win the loyalty of the mutants. We know that most of the mutants that you tried to help died. The aliens have convinced them that you only intended to torture them. We know that this is not the truth."

"They are traitors," Reslic said bluntly.

"No!" Kryslie stated as bluntly. "For ages, they have been treated poorly by the common people. All they want is to live a good life and live in peace. They don't like to be hounded out of

every town as if they were carriers of a deadly plague. No wonder the aliens could convince them to think ill of us. However, they are not traitors. Seduced by the thought of an easier life and perhaps by the idea of revenge for all the slights they have suffered – but that is all.”

“The mutants found us and would have turned us in to the aliens, had in fact called them. Yet it did not take much to get them to help us. They saw that our message got to you. They led you to us. In doing so, they risked themselves,” Tymos pointed out.

“We will send an envoy to them,” Tymoros said, voicing an option.

“No,” Tymos insisted. “They will not trust any of you, or anyone that you send. Yet they trust us – even though they know that one day one of us might be Governor, like you.”

“They see you as children who can be manipulated,” Xyron proposed.

“Does that matter?” Kryslie asked. “If what they want to manipulate us to do – is what we want too? Whatever their motive, deep down they don’t want to betray our world. They want their rights as citizens, to live in peace, as I said, and to have a better life than the dirt grubbing existence they have been forced into. Many of the mutants can’t even read and write...”

“Your point, Princess Kryslie? Prince Tymos?” Reslic asked implacably.

Tymos stated unequivocally, “We must visit all the mutant tribes in these mountains and consolidate them as our allies. Those who have the rudiments of telepathy are already firmly on our side but we must convince all of them.”

“There will be time for that when your training is finished!” Reslic said sharply.

“No, the time is now – before the aliens discover our interference, before they turn the minds of the mutants against us again. We can do this. We must do this. No one else can.” Tymos insisted.

“You have not had the training in diplomacy,” Tymoros said with a faint sigh.

A memory, rising from the mind meld – of a future too vast to comprehend – and a terrible time to come.

Kryslie had a sudden leap of intuition. “Isn’t this why you melded with us? Why you pushed us into level Delta? You feared that we would not have the time to finish our education. Isn’t that what you intended? That we would have the knowledge we need, when we need it?”

“Yes, that is true,” Tymoros sighed. “I have had you for too short a time to be happy sending you into danger. There will be a war, a dreadful, wasteful, dirty war. The Elders see you as the hope for the future – I don’t want to risk you.”

Tymos faced his father and spoke with all his heart. “Father – we must do this – for peace. You would not hesitate to send any of our older cousins out for that cause. You cannot deny us that right. And I think we must do this, because of what we are, because we are Advocates of the Guardians.”

“You are not afraid of the huge task you have set yourselves?” Xyron asked.

“Of this, no. We believe, as you have often told us, that the Guardians would not set us an impossible task. We must do this.”

The expression on the faces of Tymoros and Xyron became less severe, as they sensed something greater than just a whim of inexperienced children.

“If it is what you must do,” Tymoros relented. “Then you must go. Have you considered though that the alien warlord will be sparing no effort to capture you again?”

Tymos began to smile, but it wasn’t one of mirth. “Yes. I have at least. The alien leader has seen us as children. He has a measure of our power, but he cannot fully comprehend what we can do. Those that he has taken and trained, do not have our strength or stubbornness and we have not been here a year yet. Based on his wards, he will not expect too much from us nor will he realise that we think differently to the majority of Royal Children. He will expect you to drag us back to the safety of the estate – where they failed to take us. I doubt that he will expect us to be wandering, alone, in the mountains and living off the land.”

Reslic remarked, “You have no experience fending for yourself.”

Tymos did not get the surge of memories to back up his claim of. “We will learn.”

Kryslie supplied a warning of her own. “Don’t fall into that same trap. We are no longer children. The war hasn’t started yet – when it does, we will do what we were created to do – what we must do - like now. We are trying to turn the balance back in our favour.”

“Do not let this freedom seduce you,” Reslic warned in turn, feeling the deep sense of purpose in each of them. “You are not the creatures of legend that we have foreseen – not yet. But you will be acting in our name.”

“We will act with all honour,” Tymos promised.

“That I do not doubt,” Reslic admitted. “However, you might have to act as judge and jury. Could you kill if you had to?”

“Yes,” Tymos said standing straighter. “I have, and in the future, if the crime warranted death and the criminal was unredeemable, or it is the only way to an end – I will again.”

Reslic looked at Kryslie.

“We will do what we must,” Kryslie told him. “But killing would not be my first way.”

“I will come with you,” Jonko decided, speaking up.

Tymos spoke quickly, before Xyron had a chance to counter that pledge.

“No, Jon, Kel,” Tymos willed them to agree with his wishes. “As much as we would prefer to have you with us, you must return and tell of all we learnt while on the alien ship.”

“There is much that you know that we do not!” Jonko protested. “You...”

Jonko broke off in mid-sentence; he felt Kryslie’s presence in his mind and a sudden flash of knowledge.

“It is necessary that the Governor’s know of all that we learnt. I have given you all the information that I had in my mind about the alien mother-ship.”

“Keleb, you now have my discoveries.” Tymos explained to his friend. “I am sorry was rough, you are not fully receptive to the thoughts I send.”

Kryslie added, “We would rather you returned to reassure Llaimos that we are well. And you can join Stenn in giving him extra protection and lessons.”

The Governors conferred silently for a while, excluding Tymos and Kryslie from their minds.

Tymoros said finally. “I will leave four guards with you and you will report to us when you can.”

“Thank you, father, and thank you Your Excellency,” Kryslie said softly. “We will not be in great danger as we can deal with any aliens left in the mountains and the mutants won’t harm us.”

Neither Tymos, nor Kryslie doubted the concern in the minds of the Governors. They respected it, knowing the reason for it. Their father had lost all but three children and had just learnt that three more that he had mourned as dead were actually firmly allied with the aliens.

Tymoros was not embarrassed to give his children an embrace before returning to the Royal Estate with Jonko and Keleb.

Tymos watched as Reslic directed the shrouding of the burnt remains and then moved to talk to four Guardsmen. These separated and came to face him.

“I am Guardsman Allyn. Frest, Juan and Drake and I are to be your escort.”

Kryslie glanced at her brother and spoke in his stead. “We are returning to the tribe of Mithas. Bring your gear, quickly.”

She caught a fleeting change in expression, and knew Allyn did not expect to take orders from a girl.

Tymos, sharing her awareness, spoke to her mind. “They do not realise what we are.”

“Or that you and I far outrank them in status and power,” Kryslie agreed.

“They will learn....” Tymos murmured, listening to Allyn requisitioning field kits for them all.

“Yes, they will come to know that we were born to protect the sacred trust and we will do it in our own way,” Kryslie confirmed.

The End

This is the end of The Tymorean Trust Book One - Power Rising.
The story will continue in Book Two - Great Ones.

If you enjoyed Power Rising, please consider leaving a review

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Short Stories:

Graffiti Girl - Valerie has become known as "The Graffiti Girl" but she is more than just a street artist. She sees and paints life her way. In Valkyrie, the second story, Valerie, blinded by an explosion, must learn to paint and see again.

Ghost Writer - Edwina is a ghost with a mission - to find out why she died. Only to do so, she must first help another girl.

Series:

The Wild One - She was human, Jai Cassidy insisted, no matter what the creepy lizard- like Atapi claimed. Understanding their barbaric language, in her head, must be a human talent. How could they be her kin? How could escaping from some perverted monster who thought she was a vulnerable female, or rescuing a helpless child from death make her a traitor? Having fled the restrictive expectations of her own family, Jai was not willing to stay a captive of the Atapi Sorcerer. She uses her natural perversity and cunning to escape, but this catapults her into the middle of a feud between the Atapi and their deadliest enemies, the Kumatan. At least the Kumatan Slave Master owed her for saving his son, and despite her mixed blood, willing to keep her alive.

In the hidden Kumatan village, despite the prejudice of the Kumatan and the provocation of the captured Atapi slaves, Jai tries to maintain her human bred values. As she learns more about herself and her unknown biological mother, she realises that she has inherited her mother's talent for sorcery and was conceived in the hope of changing the Atapi's barbaric nature.

Before she can even imagine what that means, Jai must overcome the Sorcerer using only her human guile and stubbornness.

Even when the sorcerer was dead, Jai wasn't free. Now she was suddenly responsible for all the surviving Atapi. She was their new Sorcerer, and now the Kumatan had more reason than before

to want to neutralise her power. They had a duty to protect Earth's innocents from Atapi sorcery.

Though she proclaims her humanity, the Kumatan intend to take her to Korvu when they return. Her destiny is there, but to be free to act Jai must master her own talents and escape the Kumatan.