

RETURN

A SHORT STORY

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PROLOGUE

So here we stand, in the center of the massive Companion Hall, amid Companions and Keepers from across the galaxy. I could see each ledge above occupied by a Companion, (in their true size), and their Keeper, many of which I personally knew. Each Companion had answered the call; some unknown desire that had risen from their inner depths urging them to return to their home world. Never in Companion history had a call gone out like this - summoning all the Companions in the Galaxy.

So, as I said...here we stood. We were urged to climb the stairs to the top of the center platform and step upon the Circle of Truth. Our minds would be opened to all in attendance.

Begin at the beginning... came an inner command.

We closed our eyes and seemed to float in a relaxing sea of safety and love.

We were called Peacekeepers, created to enforce the Law of the Galaxy. After the devastating war of Argosis VI and the unexpected annihilation of an entire race of beings, the Galaxy was shocked to their senses. In the aftermath of that horror, the planets united in the formation of a Guild, and pledged that never again would we allow ourselves to engage in war on such a level. Never again would we allow evil to so corrupt us.

The governments of all the planets in the Guild agreed that a special police force, with extraordinary powers, was needed to maintain the Law in the Galaxy; and so the Peacekeepers were created. This force would be independent of any planet; they would have total authority to make final decisions in all disputes. They would be answerable only to the governing Guild; a body of legal representatives from all the worlds involved. These Peacekeepers would be incorruptible, dedicated to the law, and totally impartial in settling disputes.

Training for the Peacekeeper Corps was rigorous and long, requiring the Keeper to be proficient in all forms of combat, physical and metaphysical. The individual Keeper himself would have to be conversant in all forms of the Law and graduate with a Law Degree of the 5th Level. Training would then begin to allow the Keeper to be matched with a Companion. The intensive bonding with the Companion would turn the Keeper's hair white if successful. With a successful matching, the Keeper and Companion would then be assigned an area of the Galaxy to patrol.

Matching with a Companion was vital, for it was the Companion who insured that the Peacekeeper's decisions would be accepted and followed. Knowledge of the power and impartiality of the Companions was Galaxy wide; and no one ever wanted to anger one.

An ancient evil saw his own doom fast approaching and decided to forestall it. The usurper hired the evil assassin Rubik to kill the 'Anointed' before the Companions could find him. This was unacceptable in accordance with the Law and a warrant was issued to hunt the assassin down and arrest him. Word reached the evil Rubik and the first thing he did was kill everyone who knew him; then he ran.

The Peacekeeper assigned to go after him was killed, along with his Companion, in a horrific brutal ambush. To kill a Peacekeeper was bad enough, but to slay a Companion was to invite death. The deaths were a terrible blow to the Guild, and roused the ire of the entire Companion family. This Rubik was no sentient being... he was pure evil, a brutish killer. The sentence handed down was a rare one; he had to be brought to 'final' justice.

Mya and I were given the order to track him down. Arrest him if possible - eliminate him if necessary. We accepted the warrant and set out after the rogue. Mya and I had been working together for ten years. During that time we had earned ourselves a respected name in the Peacekeepers Guild. Mya had shown her power only four times during all that time, but it was enough to spread the word around the quadrant. Many who called for a Peacekeeper would request us, for they knew they would be treated justly.

We missed Rubik by days on one planet, and hours on another. His trail was leading directly towards the forbidden system. Normally the Milky Way was out of bounds for everyone, but I was given special permission to enter the system. I reported back to the Guild that Rubik's trail lead directly towards the planet known as 'Earth'. This was considered a hands-off planet; a still evolving world with scattered wars across its surface; it had not yet learned to come together as one. Worlds such as this were to be avoided; the Law stated all contact was forbidden. Because of this unexpected turn of events, I was required to get clarification on the Law. The information I provided to the Guild now changed the game; they issued an order for the immediate liquidation of Rubik.

Mya and I were now told the real reason the Guild and the Companions were so upset. It seems that they have been waiting for a very long time for a being to evolve and rejoin the 'Waiting One'. The being was discovered on Earth and had been guided thru the centuries to the present. The being had reached total awareness and was ready to evolve and claim his rightful place. We were given special coordinates and told to land and seek out a 'teacher' named Tobruk. He would introduce us to the being and we were to escort him to the Companion home world.

All well and good, but it seems that Rubik had other plans for us. As we came around the moon Mya shouted a warning just as a barrage of fire hit our ship. Rubik was making sure we would be unable to complete our mission. I returned fire and then all hell broke loose; it was nothing short of all out mayhem. One good thing, Rubik's ship was destroyed in a fiery explosion.

My cloaking device had been damaged in the fight and Ship was losing the ability remain hidden. The COM Center was in a shambles; wires were hanging down and sparking all over. I had no way to inform the Guild about what had happened, or call for help. Mya tried to use her abilities but we were too far away for her to reach any of the other Companions. With my engines on impulse power I attempted to limp out of the area, but the ship would not turn. Soon we were caught in Earth's gravity, slowly being pulled towards the planet's surface; I thought to myself, "what else could possibly go wrong?" Maya then informed me that unfortunately, it was a sure bet that Earth's satellites had picked up the firefight. Great, just great!

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

Lazily riding a thermal, the large red-tailed hawk silently glided over the valley below hoping for a light evening snack. Spotting a rabbit scampering across the snow, he called out knowing his cohort below would flush out the rest of the herd. They would soon have a great game of chase, before enjoying the taste.

The man watched from the mountainside, having been witness to this 'play' many times. He had been on the mountain going on six years now - nearest neighbor was eight miles away and he preferred it that way. He visited the local general store maybe four times a year. No one in the small community cared a twit who he was or why he was there; they each had their own reason for seeking the solitude of the mountain. For him it was simple; he had found peace on the mountain.

He had almost lost his mind after the death of his entire family. The wrong choice by a teenager having one more for the road - driving with a buzz on an icy road. The papers had a field day afterwards; 'Family of six wiped out as father watches', 'Drunken teen to blame survives'. The teenager survived the crash yes, but he would live out the rest of his life in a wheelchair as a paraplegic.

Months later at his trial the man had stood up and asked to speak. A hush had fallen over the courtroom as everyone expected him to lash into the boy. Instead he asked the judge to be lenient. God had punished the boy already he said; it was enough. The boy knew the depth of his error; it was time for everyone to heal. The judge gave the boy 5 years probation, with the stipulation that he go and speak to fellow teens at High Schools.

The boy had broken down sobbing as the man passed, begging him for forgiveness saying he was so, so sorry. The man had looked into the boy's eyes and recognized his anguish. He had knelt beside the boy putting his arms about him telling him he was forgiven. He could not go on hating him for what amounted to a horrible accident. He told him to be strong, and even wished him well. Then he walked away amid flashing cameras and reporters shouting questions. They hounded him, wanting 'his' story; wouldn't leave him alone no matter where he went. He finally had to get a court order to keep them away.

As time went by he could feel the panic rising; knew that he had to get away from people; from civilization. So he set a plan in motion; he took courses from the local junior high college; woodworking, survival skills, learned the use of a bow and arrow, (became a pretty decent shot), and learned to shoot a gun, and a rifle. He took a beginners course in horticulture, farming, etc. and also studied the religions of the world and their effects on society. When he felt he was ready, he cashed in his IRA and 401k, bought an old truck, packed his things, his wife's favorite quilt, and the kids cat, and headed for the mountains.

It took him nine months to find the right place, when he saw the small valley in the hills of Montana, he knew. He bought two acres on the mountainside just above the small lake, and set his cabin not far from the lake. The work erecting the cabin helped him to heal; the long hours of toil kept his mind busy, and in the evenings he would fall into bed exhausted. He settled into a routine and was comfortable with his life.

He had worked thru his pain and accepted what had happened. The way he accepted it might be considered strange, but then he had always looked at things differently.

Finishing up the evening meal Brent rose from the table and cleared away his plate. A meow from Rusty told him that he was finished also and wanted out. He opened the side door and saw Red waiting in the tree across from the cabin. He chuckled as Rusty ran out and headed for the woods with the large bird following.

Ever since settling here he had watched the lazy red tabby slowly revert to his wild side; the large cat had come back to life in the mountainside. He began by chasing butterflies, then mice, soon squirrels followed, and then rabbits. Over the years his skills had sharpened, and so had his physique; hard muscles and sinew under that fluffy red coat. He was very fast and had improved to the point that one-day he came prancing home proudly displaying a red hawk in his mouth – alive. It took the man a devil of a time getting the bird from him, but he did; and after caring for the bird he released it back into the wild.

The damn bird came back time and again landing on the weather vane and calling out in its high-pitched voice. The cat would come running and the bird would take off just as he struck; he would taunt the cat all afternoon like this – his revenge.

And then one day a cantankerous, old raccoon twice his size attacked Rusty. The cat held his own pretty good, but he was no match for the razor sharp claws of the coon. High above the large hawk circled and watched what was taking place below. As the raccoon pinned the cat the hawk screeched loudly and dove straight down. It struck the raccoon with such force that it knocked it down and sent it rolling. The hawk's talons made short work of the raccoon's head and eyes. The hawk then flew to the cat and seeing the blood headed to the cabin screeching wildly. Brent seemed to understand something was amiss and followed the hawk back to the cat.

It took Rusty two weeks to heal properly, the hawk coming every day to check on him from the large tree at the side of the cabin. The man began to call him Red and put small bits of meat out for him; the magnificent hawk allowed the man to come close, but not to touch him. When Rusty was fully healed and back outside, Brent discovered the cat and the hawk had become fast friends.

Watching them go off to do God knows what, he took a deep breath.

Fresh air, honey, the sweet scent of wild jasmine; mmm, glad I brought the plant with me. It's going to be a great evening. Should be clear, plenty of stars out tonight; I might get to see some new ones.

He went back in the cabin taking the plant with him and putting it on the window ledge on the east side of the house. Then he washed and dried his plate and glass. He took down and filled his canteen, went to a side room and returned with his telescope and tripod. He grabbed his camera, jacket and walking stick and set out for his evening perch. It wasn't far, but it gave him a magnificent view of the valley below; this evening was particularly beautiful. The valley was covered in a soft blanket of snow; it reflected the bright moonlight like a thousand glittering stars.

You certainly do have a way with nature, Lord. Just when I think you can't outdo yourself, you come up with a scene like this. It evokes deep feelings within; not sure I like that. Anyway, thank you for allowing me a glimpse into your world.

He set up the tripod, mounted the telescope, and began refining the angle and trajectory. He was so intent that he didn't see the bright flash out in space until it was almost gone. He tried to bring the image into sharp focus but it seemed to be moving. He looked and then looked again; he could have sworn it looked like a ship of some kind. He became excited as he looked away and wiped his eyeglasses and then looked back. Whatever he thought he saw up there was gone.

Are you yanking my chain Lord? Did I see what we both know I think I saw?
He looked again and slowly panned across the night sky.

Aha! What the...?

The image of two dark shapes firing on each other in front of the moon was there for only a few seconds, but he had seen it. He blinked and the images disappeared.

Oh I am on to you guys... something happened up there. Last night it was a strange set of lights flying around and buzzing the planet. Tonight it appears something blew up – what is going on? I wonder if the space lab is still up there; they would surely have seen it.

He stayed up for several hours looking for what he believed to be a spaceship. Finally he gave up and took down the telescope and headed back towards the cabin. He put everything away, called Rusty in, drank his tea and thought about what might have happened up there. When his eyes began to droop, he closed everything up and went to bed. He called out during the night as many strange dreams engulfed him.

The International Space Lab did indeed see what had occurred; in fact they had some grainy pictures, a little out of focus yes, but still proof that we were not alone in the universe. The scientists on the Lab held discussions on the momentous impact this was going to have on the world and the ramifications this could have on the different religions around the world. There was a sense of jubilation on their part until the military told them not to discuss this or say a word to anyone about it. It was to be regarded as national security and they were forbidden, under penalty of prosecution for treason, from discussing it even among themselves.

Repairing the ship was proving to be more difficult than first thought; Rubik's attack had done a lot of damage. I could kick myself for not being prepared; I should have expected an ambush. Now my ship was severely damaged, and our lives were in mortal danger.

The first barrage of fire from Rubik's ship severed all of the major cables that led to the power conduit. He had planned his attack well, but seemed to have neglected my response. He was out gunned and out matched and lost in the end... or did he? Something nagged at the back of my mind... damn I couldn't remember. So I filed the thought away for later and concentrated on the work at hand.

Mya and I were splicing wires left and right just to keep in space. It soon became very clear that we could not repair the ship in space; we had to land somewhere, and repair it from the outside. We managed to get some power back online but were barely able to keep the ship from breaching the planet's atmosphere.

Mya, extremely upset, kept going back and forth down the hallway to the engine room and back again urging me to cloak and land on the planet before the engines quit permanently. I tried to explain that I had no control over the ship, let alone any cloaking ability. Besides, in all reality we would crash if we attempted it now. I had to get a few more wires spliced together, it might give us some control, and hopefully enough so we could land.

Mya turned black upon hearing the desperation in my voice; she knew I was racing the devil. She quickly offered to help solder the wires together, which I accepted, and about two hours later we had the control we needed. How long it would last was anyone's guess... hopefully long enough to breach the atmosphere and land.

"Mya, I need co-ordinates to the most remote place you can find within the parameters we have. If I am to remain cloaked until the last second, I have to have precise numbers."

Have I ever failed you my friend? We are landing in an area they call Montana. There is a snowstorm moving in; I believe we can land in the midst of it.

She was haughty in her explanation, but then she was always haughty, it was just her way. *The snow should cover our arrival and keep us off their radar.*

"As ever Mya, you are one of a kind."

Of course I am!

Tam began to pull several levers and push some buttons. The ship shuttered and began a slow descent into the Earth's atmosphere. It remained cloaked except for a few brief seconds when they altered their course by one degree. The cloaking device was brought back on line and none too quick as it only appeared as a shadow on the military radar; a new and inexperienced monitor didn't even notice it.

Down below Brent was scanning the sky, calculating how long before the snowstorm arrived.

Maybe I can get one last look before it hits, he thought to himself.

He grabbed the telescope and headed towards the ridge above the frozen lake. By the time he reached the ridge snow was falling pretty heavily, and the wind was picking up. He might get a quick look, but at this rate it would only be for a minute or two. In the end he decided against it; he didn't want to take a chance of the wind blowing the telescope over. He headed back towards the cabin as the snowfall increased and the wind doubled. As he reached the cabin he opened the large front door and turned to the hawk in the tree just outside and to the left about five feet.

“We got a nasty ice storm coming Red, you want to spend the night with us?”

The hawk keened once, flew thru the door, and perched up in the rafters of the open cabin. It knew if this human offered sanctuary, it was wise to accept. Besides, it would be nice and warm, and the human would offer meat. Of all the humans the hawk had dealt with in its lifetime, he found this one to be trustworthy.

The cabin was one large room, sectioned off into three main areas: the kitchen area, the sitting area, and bedroom area. When building the cabin he found it easier to just keep it simple, one large room he could partition off with furniture. He situated the cabin backed up smack into the mountainside. He hollowed out a large 12' x 12' room inside the mountain itself, accessible only by the back door of the cabin. He used this space as a storeroom and root cellar, and expanded it over the years. A large front porch wrapped around the cabin half way, leaving a space for the woodpile for the stove. The front door was extra wide with three 'U' shape slots on it. When shut, a bar could be run thru the slots and seal the door from the inside. The same with the windows, they could be shut tight in seconds.

During his first year on the mountain, he was overrun by two hungry bears just as winter set in. They turned the place into a shambles and made off with most of his food. He learned a bitter lesson the hard way, (best way to learn a lesson), and reinforced the cabin doors and windows. He hadn't had a problem since. Brent closed up everything knowing the storm would pass during the night. He laid extra wood by the fireplace and built up the fire; it was going to be a very cold night. Rusty was already curled up on his rug by the fire. He made his tea, changed into some warm PJ's, and climbed into bed. He read for about an hour and then turned off the light, slid down under the covers, and drifted off to sleep.

Outside the wind howled, and the storm began to rage as it moved into the valley.

From far away a loud voice was intruding into Brent's dream...

“What?”

Brent jolted awake, he sat up and looked around clearing his mind. A loud screaming sound had woken him, or so he thought. He listened for a moment but all he heard was the storm howling outside the cabin. Maybe it was just a dream of someone calling.

TAM! (there it was again!)

Brent's head was throbbing; he sat and rubbed his temples for a bit. He drew his legs up and leaned on them for a moment, rocking. Finally he threw the heavy quilt aside and got up and went for a glass of water. On his way to the kitchen he heard it again.

.....*Tam?*

He grabbed his head and stopped for a moment, reeling with pain.

“Good God!” He exclaimed in momentary alarm as he slammed his back into the wall and slid down to the floor. He waited for a second and Rusty came to his side meowing with concern.

“It's okay boy, I'm having a moment... I'll be alright.”

He slowly got up and went to the sink, worked the pump and got a glass of water. Five minutes went by and nothing. He grabbed his coat and slippers and went out front and listened... nothing. It was bone chilling cold out there and except for wind, nothing. He decided he must have been dreaming; he turned to go in when he heard it clearly...

Mya... where are you?

He froze in mid-step.

Mya?

Tam?

Brent immediately felt the urgency in the voices. A ‘flash’ came into his mind of a long dark hallway; smoke all round. There was another flash of a smoky room, and a lot of dials on a long dashboard in front of him. He went inside and sat down holding his head, his mind racing with thoughts. He tried to calm himself, but he had several more ‘flashes’. He tried to figure out what was happening.

“... it's in my head; I'm hearing it in my head!”

He had studied metaphysics and various religions and even dabbled in mind-altering experiments. In the end he had found his own truth about the world, God, and Life. It brought him the peace he so earnestly had been seeking. Now he was applying that knowledge to what was happening.

I am not mad, this I know; so I must be picking up something telepathically.

Ok, calm yourself man; center yourself.

A deep breath and a long slow release and peace of mind returned. Brent took another deep breath and sent his mind out ever so slightly. Listening to the storm outside, he got an immediate 'feeling' of unexpected mayhem and something akin to fear.

Mya, where are you? I've been hurt; I can't--- can't find you.

Tam... Tam, I am trapped... a beam has me pinned!

Mya?

Brent had the distinct 'feeling' that there was a link to what he saw the previous night and what was happening now. He couldn't explain how he knew, he just knew. He made a conscious decision to do something about it.

He changed clothes and dressed warmly right down to his boots. He took his backpack out and filled it with the first aid kit, some rope, and a flare gun. He grabbed a flashlight, several blankets, and pulled on his hat and goggles. He turned up the collar of his coat, wrapped a warm wool scarf around his neck, and headed out towards the shed on the side of the cabin. He had to shovel some snow out of the way so he could open the door and drag out the sled. He also grabbed his snowshoes and put them on. He threw the blankets and an extra sleeping bag in the sled and headed for the lake. The wind was blowing pretty hard and the snow was falling heavily, but the sled glided easily and he made good time. As he came around the side of some large boulders he stopped in his tracks and stared at the scene before him. Something had landed at the far end of the frozen lake and skidded into a large snowdrift.

A spacecraft!

It was oblong and silver in appearance; a wing was poking out of the large snow bank. It was dotted with dark blast marks along one side. The heat from the craft was melting the snow on it and he got a pretty good look at the ship.

Sun of a gun!

He moved forward unafraid; in fact he was extremely curious. An alien craft and the possibility of lizard-like creatures or worse never entered his mind. As he moved closer he began to feel the heat coming off the ship. The first cohesive thought to come into his mind was to wonder if anyone was hurt. As he moved closer there was a loud hissing sound and a panel on the side of the ship slid open. A great billow of dark smoke poured out and was immediately swept away by the wind. He froze in mid-step.

Covered in snow like some gigantic snowman, he blended in with the storm and surrounding area. Movement from inside the ship alerted him and he watched with held breath.

Suddenly a man came to the doorway and fell out onto the snowy ground. He was tall, at least 7 feet. He was muscular, chiseled facial features, long white hair, blowing wildly in the wind. His head and face were very bloody. He slowly rose and took a step and fell again and rolled over. Brandon could see he had a nasty cut on his forehead; it was deep and bleeding profusely.

Mya...! He screamed loudly without opening his mouth.

That's when Brent realized he was hearing him in his mind. So what he had heard before was real and not a nightmare. He took a step forward and the alien/man in the snow turned and looked at him with wild eyes. Summoning his courage he raised his hand as if patting the wind saying; *it's all right, I'm a friend; I'm here to help.*

The alien/man stared at him for a moment and then answered.
Mya... Mya is trapped inside; got to help her. Oh my head... I can't... I...
He fainted right there in the snow, the wind howling about him.

“Okay... now what do I do?”

Assessing the situation Brent decided to drag the man to the sled.

“You’ll freeze if I leave you out here.”

He pulled the sled closer and threw the blankets on it and put the sleeping bag on top and unzipped it. Then he went to the man and dragged him over to the sled and after several tries managed to get him on it. He zipped him up in the sleeping bag and then wrapped the blankets around him and shielded his face from the storm. When he was satisfied that he was warm enough he turned his attention to the ship.

Cautiously Brent walked over and stepped up into it.

Great billows of smoke were swirling everywhere; it was impossible to see clearly. A red light was blinking on off and it gave everything an unnatural glow. He headed for the front of the ship first, thinking this 'Mya' person was a co-pilot. He found the cockpit and was startled to find an exact replica of what he had seen in his dream. The room was empty, and with only one seat in front of the dashboard, it appeared that the man outside was the only pilot. He turned around and headed down the darkened hallway. The smoke was slowly dissipating, and he was able to see his way a lot better. The hallway was short and ended in a juncture.

Okay now, which way, left or right?

Ohhh...came a disembodied voice, Tam... where are you?

Brent damn near jumped out of his skin at the sound; he also noted the voice sounded female and was coming from the right.

"Ok, right it is."

He made his way to the right and observed the hall curved back to the left.

Tam? Answer me Tam!

He picked up alarm in the voice now. He decided he didn't need a hysterical female on his hands and decided to chance an answer.

Tam is not here Mya; he is outside in my sled. He was injured; a deep gash on his forehead rendered him unconscious. I'm a friend Mya; an Earth friend. My name is Brent, and I'm here to help, where are you?

There was a long moment of silence. During this time Brent felt a tingling sensation all thru his body. His head felt like a swarm of bees were buzzing about inside. Then it all stopped as suddenly as it began. After a bit he guessed the woman was scared and deciding whether or not to trust him.

Tam is injured?

Yes, but he's alive.

You are of this world?

Yes.

Your consciousness is vastly superior to most of your kind. You show no fear, only curiosity. I will allow this help due to the mitigating circumstances.

Gee thanks! Answered Brent sarcastically, which was totally lost on Mya.

I am about twenty feet further down the walkway. A beam has trapped me and I am unable to move.

Brent counted his steps down the walkway and stopped and looked around. There was no one on the ground in any direction. He looked carefully moving all sorts of crates and barrels.

I can't see you anywhere.

I am right above you. (replied an exasperated voice)

Brent looked up and saw nothing. He took two of the crates and positioned them and stepped up. On a ledge outcropping that ran the entire length of the ship he saw to his amazement, a small creature. It was dragon-like in appearance; it's wing was pinned, and it lay face down, beneath a large steel-like beam.

Oh my God, is that you?

Yes, and it is very uncomfortable, please hurry.

Brent looked over the area and judged quickly that if he removed the metal at the rear he would be able to raise the beam without causing anything else to fall down. He did so quickly and then came back to the creature and lifted the beam. The small dragon-like creature pulled itself free and stood. It tried out its wing several times before turning and facing him.

Thank you Brent of Earth, I am in your debt.

You are most welcome Mya. I think we should move quickly, I wouldn't want your friend to freeze outside.

First we must go to the pilot's chair. It was an order – not a request. We must retrieve something before we can leave the ship here.

The creature took off and flew straight to the cockpit with Brent running behind her. As he entered he saw it sitting in the middle of the large console.

Please sit down in the chair and turn it around.

Brent did and the chair moved by itself and slid forward centering him amid the vast array of dials and buttons.

Ship, this is Mya of the First Council, lower the retrieval remote.

ACKNOWLEDGED, MYA OF THE FIRST COUNCIL replied a disembodied voice.

A hidden door slid open and a small platform was lowered from above. On it was a strange looking ‘remote’ with several buttons on it. It was shaped like some weird space gun from a Science Fiction movie.

Please take the device Brent, and place it in your pocket. He did as instructed.

Now we may leave, she announced.

They left the cabin and went directly down the walkway to the door. Outside the wind howled loudly; snow and ice swirled about wildly; the storm had increased in ferocity. The sled bearing the man was completely covered in snow.

We are going to have to hurry if we hope to make it back to my cabin before we freeze. Can you tolerate the cold?

Not really.

If I may so bold, Brandon opened his coat, I can offer you the warmth of my body heat.

It is not permitted; my touch could have an effect on you, physically. We who are paired with a Peacekeeper do not touch other beings.

Brent turned and looked at the creature.

Look Mya, there is a raging storm about to hit us; if we are caught in it we will freeze in a matter of minutes. Your friend needs medical attention soon; and you are worried about touching me? Well don't, I'll take my chances. Now please attach yourself to my sweater or by God I will leave you here.

Very well Brent of Earth, your argument is a sound one.

The little creature leaped onto Brent thick sweater and he closed his coat over it and buttoned up. It stretched its head so it could see out over the top button. When they reached the sled Brent brushed off the snow and opened the blanket so the creature could see her friend.

Before we leave Brent of Earth, please take out the device from your pocket and point it at the ship. Brent did as instructed.

Now press the blue button twice.

He did as told and the ship disappeared.

“Son of a ...” he exclaimed.

I beg your pardon?

Sorry Mya, just an earth expression. Let's get moving.

Thirty minutes later Brent was huffing and puffing and not making much progress. The wind had increased in velocity and the snow was making it difficult to move. He was beginning to realize that he was not strong enough to pull the sled with the man all the way to his cabin. Sensing the same, Mya offered a solution.

Brent of Earth, I can see that you are having difficulty pulling the sled. May I offer assistance?

No offence Mya, but exactly what are you capable of doing?

Normally this would be forbidden Brent, but circumstances dictate that we must reach shelter quickly or we shall surely freeze. Please open your coat and release me.

Brent opened his coat and the tiny dragon flew off about twenty feet. It rose in the swirling snow and began to spin. Faster and faster it spun. A bright light began to form around it and before he could count to ten Brent was looking at a twenty-foot dragon towering above him.

“Son of a bitch!” he exclaimed grinning.

Mya reached down and picked up the sled and asked Brent to show the way. It took them fifteen minutes to reach his cabin. Mya placed the sled on the porch in front of the door and stepped away. The same bright light appeared and suddenly the tiny dragon appeared again, falling into the snow. Brent ran over and gently picked her up and received a large jolt of electricity for his effort, which knocked him on his ass.

I did warn you, chuckled Mya.

Brent shook his head, rose and went directly to the door, opened it and entered the cabin with Mya in his hands. He went to his bed and pulled the blankets down and laid the tiny dragon on one of the pillows. He removed his headgear and goggles and coat, then went to the sled and pulled it into the house closing the door quickly. He moved the man from the sled and plopped him onto the bed. He went over to the fire and added two more logs.

Rusty, who was curious, rose and sniffing the air started towards the bed.

“We have unexpected guests, Rusty, and they are off limits.”

The tone in his voice told the cat this was a ‘no-no’, and the feline sat down.

Brent looked above at the advancing hawk, who was observing the situation also.

“That goes for you too Red, off limits, you understand?”

The hawk keened once and returned to its original perch.

It appears this human has dominion over the animals of this planet, Mya thought to herself as she watched Brent.

Brent went into the kitchen and filled a large bowl with water and returned. He went to the bed and began to remove the man's boots and jacket.

Well, he's humanoid in appearance, he thought with a sigh.

The man appeared quite muscular, his body well toned. He had chiseled facial features with a classic Roman nose; he had the kind of good looks that drive the ladies wild. His white hair was thick and long, and his hands were six fingered. Brent placed him under the covers, cleaned his head wound and used butterfly Band-Aids on the open tear. Satisfied, he went into the kitchen, threw the water down the drain, rinsed the bowl and washed his hands. He leaned against the sink for a moment, thinking. He reached above one of the cabinets and pulled out a bottle of Jack Daniels and took a long swig. It burned going down, but seemed to steady him.

Son of a bitch – I've got aliens, real aliens, sleeping in my house! I just hope they managed to land without attracting any attention from the feds. Those boys will be all over this mountain by morning if they did. Geese, I don't know what the hell I'm doing here.

He sighed deeply; everything that happened was catching up to him.

God I'm tired, I just want to rest for a bit.

He looked around the corner, both his 'guests' were sleeping. Brent pulled out one of his sleeping bags from the storage area and placed it in front of the fireplace. He locked everything up; changed into pajamas, and climbed into the sleeping bag. He took a deep breath and let his mind replay everything from the time he first saw the ship. He drifted off to sleep in a matter of minutes.

In the early morning hours Mya woke and quietly rose checking out her new surroundings. She studied the cabin carefully thinking it primitive at first, but reassessed her judgment when she realized the man wanted it to appear that way. He had taken great pains to conceal the cabin in the midst of a heavy forest, set flat against the side of a mountain. It was simple in design to blend in with the surrounding area. Inside there was the appearance of minimum use of space. Appearances can be deceiving; Mya saw there was a hidden room at the rear of the cabin, behind a bookcase. Mya flew to the bookcase/door at the rear of the cabin and using her mind, opened it. She scanned the interior and 'saw' the short-wave radio set; the rifles on the wall; the crossbow; and a well stocked root cellar beneath the floor. This man was well prepared... but for what she wondered.

The hawk perched in the rafters above keened lightly and caught Mya's attention. Mya returned the great birds glare with distain. A flare of the tail feathers and a challenge and within the blink of an eye Mya was on the beam not five feet from the large bird.

The Hawk lowered his head and stretched his neck.

I will not allow you to hurt this man, he hissed at her.

I have no intention of harming your master, Mya explained, he has a good heart.

He is not my master, and you and your friend are not of this world, hissed the hawk again.

It was a statement of fact and Mya quickly realized that the great hawk was a lot more intelligent than she first thought. She was finding that things were not at all as they appeared on this strange planet. She decided to tell the hawk the truth... partially. She turned and faced the hawk and bowed with great flair.

My friend and I are Peacekeepers, Great One. I am Mya of the First Council.

Mya spread her wings and stood erect in announcing her place.

The hawk flared its wings and lowered its head in reply.

We were attempting to track down a dangerous criminal who was reported headed towards your planet. He attacked, damaging our ship severely and we crash-landed here. My friend was injured and I was trapped. Your 'friend' showed up and offered to help us.

Red puffed up his feathers; *and what of your quarry?*

His ship exploded in space, but as we were busy trying to keep ours from doing the same, I cannot be sure that he died in the ship. If he got away, he will do everything in his power to find us and kill us.

The great hawk closed his eyes and remained still for some time. Just as Mya was about to give up he raised his head and turned to her spreading his wings wide again.

I am Alpha, First of the Red Hawks that abide in this valley; only the Teacher ranks higher.

Mya bowed in respectful acknowledgement.

For your benefit, and the man's safety I will call upon my brothers and sisters across this valley to inform me if any strangers approach the mountain. The man has helped many in this valley asking nothing in return. This human is not like other humans; he sees the creators' beauty and understands. He is under our protection and we will not allow harm to come to him. When the Teacher returns, I will petition him and ask for his help.

Mya picked up the feeling that the great bird thought of the man as one does of a favorite pet.

I thank you Alpha for your generosity and assistance in this matter.

Mya gave a short curtsy and turned around and returned to the pillow on the bed curling up.

Brent woke early feeling totally refreshed. He rose and put on a pot of coffee, let Red out, and released Rusty for his morning run. The snow had stopped and the morning had crispness about it. He breathed the cold morning air in deeply and let it out. His breath floated in front of him as he watched the sunrise. After a few minutes he retreated to the warmth of the cabin and went into the back room.

He had a complete bathroom back there with a shower. After cleaning up he towel dried his hair, brushed his teeth, and looked into the mirror. Staring back at him was the man he had looked like fifteen years ago. He marveled at his reflection for a moment and then chuckled. The little dragon had mentioned something about an effect to her touch. Grinning like the Cheshire cat he thought... *Mya*. Brent finished dressing and returned to the kitchen.

During this time Tam had awakened to find himself in an alien environment. Remaining still he called out to Mya. She calmed him and explained in detail what had occurred the night before. She gave him her assessment of Brent, and he accepted it without question. Then she informed him of how they had arrived at the cabin.

Mya! I am surprised at you; contact is forbidden! We don't know what kind of effect it could have on him. I understand the circumstances, but there must have been another way.

Mya was miffed at Tam's admonishment; she knew the Law as well as him. *If there had been another way I would have found it. There was none and I did what I thought best.*

Oh ho, a little testy aren't we?

I am nothing of the sort!

I'm not angry with you Mya; it's just that we will have to justify this when we return.

Don't you think I have already thought of that? And I might as well get this out now too; I am not certain that our warrant was destroyed with his ship. I have reason to believe that he may have jettisoned to earth in a life pod

What? No, no... could anything else go wrong?

The human who came to our rescue did so after experiencing the crash thru a vision, and he heard us calling to each other. I probed him and found he has many more talents that he isn't even aware of yet. We would have frozen to death if not for his aid. Tam, he has a glow about him, he is a pure heart. I believe he is the one we were sent to find.

Finally – good news! Okay, first off we need to repair the ship; then we need to fix the scanner and find out if Rubik is on this planet. God help us if he is.

There is more Tam... Mya explained about her run-in with the hawk and what had transpired between them.

Is there anything else, asked an exasperated Tam.

That should cover it Tam; on the plus side, at least we survived the crash.

That is an understatement my sweet.

Brent came around the corner smiling at just that moment and both Tam and Mya turned in unison.

Good Morning you two, welcome to Earth!

Tam stared at the man before him. He had seen pictures of earthlings before, but this one was different somehow. His face was oval, open, and even and his eyes seemed to sparkle. His hair was golden and his form was fit and muscular. He found him pleasing in appearance, and he liked his attitude. Mya ‘felt’ him changed in some way, but she wasn’t sure how. She had never gotten a good look at the man last night, it had been too dark and later he had been curled up in front of the fire.

“I don’t know what you people eat,” he smiled at Tam, “but if you’re game I’ll make breakfast.” Brent turned around and went into the kitchen.

Food Mya, Tam offered turning and explaining, *he is offering us food.*

Ah, this should be interesting, Mya answered as she flew across the room to perch on the refrigerator above Brent. Tam rose, pulled on his shirt and followed.

“My name is Tam, Peacekeeper of the Law of the Fifth District,” he said with a short bow.

Brent thrust out his hand and said, “Glad to meet you Tam; my name is Brent.” Tam looked at his offered hand and back at him. Brandon reached over and took Tam’s hand in his and shook it.

“It’s a form of greeting, doesn’t mean anything special, just something we do,” he explained. “I am making biscuits, bacon, and scrambled eggs. I have juice, coffee, and water to drink. I don’t know if our food will agree with your systems; so you’ll have to decide if want to give it a try,” he explained.

“What are you cooking now?” asked Tam sniffing at the frying pan filled with bacon.

“It’s called bacon; it’s a cured meat.”

Smells very enticing, chimed in Mya, I should like to try that.

Brent picked up a piece and broke off a small bit and handed it to Mya.

Here you go Mya, try this and let me know what you think.

Mya took the piece of bacon in her small claws and took a bite. She chewed and swallowed greedily murmuring; *mmm... this is very good! May I have more?*

Great, I’ll fix you a plate.

Brent took down a small saucer and broke up some bacon into small pieces and placed it on top of the refrigerator.

You must try it Tam; it is very good, Mya thought as she noisily licked her fingers.

“Pardon but I never asked if you guys are vegetarians,” Brent asked while cooking, “or if you eat meat?”

“We eat just about anything,” replied Tam. “You know, that really does smell good.”

Brent handed him forks and knives and napkins and told him to place them on the table.

When Tam returned he handed him a mug of coffee.

“Don’t know if you will like it, I like mine sweet so I added a bit of sugar.”

Brent scrambled up a half dozen eggs and divided them up between the three of them. He pulled the biscuits out of the oven and placed everything on the table, along with some butter and honey.

“This coffee is full of caffeena,” exclaimed Tam happily, “oh what a lucky break.”

Mya flew to the table as Tam carried her plate for her. Brent placed a small cup of water beside her plate. They sat down at the table and Brent made a silent blessing. The small act seemed to have an enormous impact on his ‘guests’, which he did not understand. They ate with questions interspaced between bites.

“So, where do you guys come from?”

Outside your Galaxy, replied Mya looking at Tam.

“That doesn’t exactly tell me where,” pushed Brent.

“We prefer to keep it that way,” Tam said harshly.

Brent looked at Tam with a furrowed brow, "I was just asking."

"Let me explain, your planet is not yet a member of the Guild; therefore, it must remain in the dark about the rest of us."

"You might be a little late on that one slick. I just hope no one picked you guys up on their radar. So why the cold shoulder... you people consider us too warlike, or maybe too backward?" he asked earnestly.

Where do you get your insight Brent of Earth? Mya looked at Tam and he nodded. You are correct in your assessment of your fellow humans. But you are a definite surprise. You possess an ability that requires many years of training for us. As to your planet, well, they have not yet learned to come together. Until that happens they will be kept apart from the rest of the universe.

Tam asked for more coffee and Brent returned with the coffee pot and poured him another cup. He set down a trivet and placed the pot on it, and handed Tam the sugar.

**"So are you guys going to erase my memory of all this when you leave?"
Tam and Mya looked at each other and nodded.**

"We may not have to," answered Tam, "but we do have need of your help before that problem is addressed."

Tell him everything Tam, he will understand, interjected Mya into his thoughts.

"The creature we were chasing may have gotten away. If that is so he will stop at nothing to hunt us down and destroy us. If he has to take out this whole valley to ensure that, he will do it without a second thought." Tam looked at Brent, "I am sorry."

"Don't be, it's not your fault," Brent smiled. "What can I do to help?"

A question Brent, Mya interrupted, are you in communication with the red hawk?

With Red, not on a level like this; but I do believe he understands me. Why do you ask?
**Brent suddenly realized Mya could talk to the large bird.
You can talk to him, can't you?**

Yes Brent and he gave me the impression that he considers you a member of his family. We spoke last night. He has agreed to have his extended family keep an eye on the forest and mountain. If a stranger shows up he will inform us immediately.

Well I'll be, exclaimed Brent; *I always knew that bird was special.*

He also spoke of someone called the Teacher; apparently he is the supreme ruler of this area. Do you have any idea who that could be?

Not in the slightest. Brent thought for a moment, maybe the golden eagles that live on the top of the mountain. I just don't know, sorry Mya.

“I would like to take a look at my ship. Is it safe to go outside now?” Tam was anxious to get started fixing his ship.

“Yes, the storm has passed for now, but we have another right behind it;” Brent informed him, “It won't arrive till tonight, so we should have good weather all day. It's about 20 degrees out there, you'll need a coat; I can loan you one of my old ones.”

“Lets get started then, I want to be out of here as soon as possible.” Tam headed for the main door.

Brent cleared the table and washed their dishes and cups and left them to drain. He straightened up and grabbed the extra coat and handed it to Tam, who opened it and Mya flew to him and he closed it about her. Brent reached into his pocket and handed Tam the alien remote.

The cold hit them like a slap in the face, but the wind had died down so it was bearable. Brent went immediately to the shed and retrieved the extra set of snowshoes for Tam. He showed him how to put them on and they were soon on their way. It took them a half hour to get to the lake and Brent led them around the path to the far side where the ship was hidden.

The snowstorm had obliterated all trace of their landing and slide into the snow bank. Brent pointed out where the ship was and Tam took out the remote and pressed the green button. The large ship materialized amid the snow looking very alien in the pristine environment. Tam pressed some other buttons and the side door slid open, they immediately went to the pilot's cabin.

“Ship,” Tam announced loudly, “Tam and Mya back on line.”

“DEFENCES ON STANDBY KEEPER TAM; I HAVE DAMAGE TO MY ENGINES AND COM CENTER.

“Thank you Ship, we are here to correct that problem,” Tam answered, “please connect to Mya and download your data.”

Now that the smoke was gone Brent got a better look at the inside of the spaceship. It was the same silvery stainless steel as the outer shell. He marveled at the console as Tam pressed all kind of buttons and read out the data being shown on the computer screen. The written language was somehow familiar, but indecipherable to him.

Tam, the damage is not so severe, Mya reported, it can be fixed from the outside. A few wires need to be splice and reattached and some cables need to be soldered. Ship has already taken care of the internal problems.

Great Mya, have Ship scan the planet for Rubik's life signs as soon as possible. If he made it here we need to know where he is located.

“Can I help,” Brent asked feeling like a fifth wheel.

“As a matter of fact you can,” replied Tam rising from the console. “Let’s take a walk and survey the damage inside Ship.”

Brent followed as Tam headed down the hallway. They lifted beams back into place and moved crates and boxes back against the wall and replaced the restraining straps around them. At one point he remarked that this was where he had found Mya pinned under a beam. They went thru a hatchway and Brent found himself in Tams quarters. He helped him tidy it up and found a photograph in the process. It was of a female who looked similar to Tam, the same long white hair, and the same eyes.

Holding the picture out he asked, “Is this your girlfriend?”

Tam turned and looked at the photo. Suddenly his features softened and he took the picture. “My mate, she died some time ago; before I became a Peacekeeper.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Brent said softly, “I know that pain well.” And everything he thought was forgotten came rushing back. He turned away as his eyes filled with tears.

Tam looked at him for a long time and then whispered, “Yes, I believe you do.” Feeling uncomfortable he changed the subject. “Well, that’s enough here, there’s a whole lot more of ship to look after.”

With that he headed out the door and continued on to the Galley. There was a small table and chair, and a counter area with cabinets above it. They were locked, but other things were strewn about. On a sidewall was a bookcase, its books all over the floor. Brent helped pick them up and replace them on the shelves. He noted books of all kinds by the pictures on the covers. One book caught his eye; it had a picture of earth on its cover.

“You have a book on Earth?” He asked excitedly.

“As Peacekeeper of the Fifth District I have to be aware of all the planets in my jurisdiction,” he replied dryly, “and their laws. Your planet has too many; they contradict each other.”

“Amen to that,” he replied in kind.

“Let’s take a look at the docking bay. My skimmer is there, and I hope not to badly damaged.”

He headed down the walkway to the rear of the ship. They stepped thru a hatchway into a huge bay area. Across a platform and down some stairs led them to floor of the docking bay. Tam’s skimmer was banged up a bit, but otherwise not damaged. It was a smaller version of Ship, almost the size of a small Lear jet, silvery and sleek in design.

“Wow!”

“What is it,” Tam asked surprised at his reaction.

“Oh, no, nothing; it’s just a human exclamation,” Brent explained. “That is one beautiful machine.”

“Yes, I enjoy the skimmer,” he mused for a moment, “I like to take her out sometimes and just fly about.”

Tam went over to a small locker and removed a tool kit and came back to where Brent was standing. He watched him as he stared at the skimmer lightly running his hands over its sleek body. Tam had to admit that this human was very surprising in his reactions to his and Mya presence, and the events that took place.

“Brent, we have to leave,” Tam said, “I want to look at the outside of the ship.”

Brent nodded and they left the bay area. Tam called to Mya saying he was going outside. She flew back to the opening and met him there. They stepped outside and were about to go around towards the back of the ship when the red hawk keened loudly.

Mya looked up and called to the bird. *Good day Alpha, it is nice to see you again.*

The mountain is clear, and word has come that the ship you chased crashed and the evil was destroyed within it. The Teacher wishes to speak with you both.

Of course, we would be honored to meet him.* Mya looked at Tam, *more surprises.

The red hawk keened once and a huge wolf with a thick black coat and a white streak down its forehead slowly sauntered out of the forest. The animal was massive, at least 400 lbs, he was extremely muscular and fit in every sense.

He approached Tam and Mya as a king granting an audience to his subject. He looked them both over and then sat.

You are not of this mountain, or this world. He stated flatly.

Mya asked Tam to open his coat and she stepped on his out stretched arm. She spread her wings and bowed and had Tam do the same.

Greetings Great One, I am Mya of the First Council...

I am aware of who you are and what you and your companion do. It is a noble profession in your world, but not here. They have not evolved enough to understand you and your kind. They would hunt you down and kill you.

Brent stared open mouthed at the great wolf. He had never suspected that he was anything more than a magnificent animal. Inside, he felt humbled at the revelation that was taking place.

Except for this being, who is more than you know; this world is not ready for you yet. I have nurtured the beings on this planet for centuries; and I have waited millennia for this meeting to finally take place. This being has evolved and reached Apex... he is ready for his destiny. When you leave here you will take him with you. Search out your heart and hear the call of the Companions Mya; you are to return to your home world and he is to go with you.

Mya was quiet for a long time, going deep within. She raised her head and looked at Tam with surprise.

It is true Tam; the 'call' has gone out for all Companions to return. She turned and faced the wolf, We will fix our ship and be gone in two days. May we ask for your protection till that time?

It is given Mya of the First Council and Tam of the Peacekeeper Guild. Please relay the salutations of Tobruk to your Master teacher.

With that the great wolf turned and disappeared into the surrounding forest. The hawk keened once and joined him.

This planet is full of surprises Mya. What is he talking about; and what was that about the Master teacher? Tam was getting an uneasy feeling, what other surprises do they have I wonder?

Mya picked up on his thought and agreed. *Indeed Tam, they are a very unique race, it appears their animals know more than the people do. I wonder if they are the true guardians this world. Fascinating!*

Guys, what did he say? I missed the last part, Brent asked. He knows who you are, and he seems to know all about you.

Yes Brent, he does, replied Maya, he also says that you are to return with us when we leave here.

Go with you... great - I'd love to! Brent replied without the slightest hesitation.

Both Maya and Tam looked at each other in surprise. Then Tam shrugged his shoulders and headed for the back of the ship.

Okay, he said breaking the spell, let's check out the engines and get these repairs finished.

They worked all day reconnecting wires and soldering cables back into place. Tam was able to make a patch in the machine shop to cover the area where Rubik's ship had blasted a hole. They would set it in place in the morning and Mya would weld it to the ship. By late afternoon they were cold, hungry, and weary; ready to call it a day. They headed back to the cabin as the wind began to pick up again. By the time they reached the cabin, snow was beginning to fall.

They returned to the cabin in silence; each occupied with their own thoughts about the events that took place. Tam stoked the fire and added an extra log. Brent brewed a pot of raspberry tea and set two mugs on the table.

“May I relate something that may have a bearing on all this,” announced Brent.

“Please do,” Tam replied, “and we will reveal what we can to you.”

I would like to start by telling you both about something. I have dreamt on and off, all my life about a large golden colored egg... it is behind stone doors in a chamber that can only be reached by going deep underground. It sits on an altar stone, high up in a cavern. There are ledges all around the cavern. Does that mean anything to you?

Tam leaped to his feet. *How do you know about that?*
Mya joined him, *how could you know of the Anointed?*

Whoa, easy! I'm sorry if I broke some sacred law or something. I just thought maybe that it had some significance, that it meant something to you.

Why would you think it does?

“Oh come on guys?” Brent was losing patience with them; “I mean look at the evidence, you guys landing here, me finding you, my childhood dream returning after all these years... coincidence? I think not! And I am getting younger.”

“You’re what?” asked Tam not understanding.

“I am 62 years old; in case you didn’t know, that is considered pretty old here.” Brent rose and began to pace around the table. “This morning I looked at myself in a mirror and ‘lo and behold I look like I did when I was in my forties. My white hair is gone, my bones don’t ache, I am filled with energy...I feel like a kid again.”

“So you think there is something else at play here,” Tam asked earnestly.

“Yes, I do,” Brent took a deep breath, “You said the wolf mentioned that I am more. I have always had a feeling that I am different from everyone else.”

He looked at Mya; *I am not being vain Mya. I just know that there is something that makes me unlike those around me.*

It appears my dear that you are indeed different... Mya looked at Tam and nodded.

A scratching at the door broke the tension in the room. Brent went and opened the door and Rusty ran in from the icy cold.

Tam continued with an explanation of sorts. *Tobruk said that you had evolved to a higher level than those of your planet. He alluded to the fact that he had been on this planet for a very long time. Tam stood up and went over to Brent. He said that when we leave we were to take you with us and return to Mya's home world.*

We Companions have a very old legend, Mya began, one that until now I thought was just that... a story. It concerns an ancient teacher who travels the universe aiding in the evolution of worlds. It is said that he is a shape shifter, that he gives small nudges to sentient worlds leading them to the path of truth. Mya took a breath and looked at Tam, in our world he was known as Tobruk.

Mya, do you think...is it possible that he is the same one? Tam ran his fingers back over his head, but why reveal himself to us?

Our greatest Prophecy says that the Anointed One will awaken when his Right Hand evolves and returns to him. Mya flew to the fireplace mantle and looked at Brent. I believe that is you, Brent.

Wait Mya, Tam said joining them at the fireplace, haven't there been others before that thought they were the One. And didn't they all fail to climb to the top? They all died of madness if I remember correctly.

Yes Tam, but they were not recommended by Tobruk. Acceptance dawned on both Tam and Brent as Mya continued. I believe that the Anointed One's Right Hand is before us.

Something tells me that you may be right, Mya. Tam's words rang with certain truth.

I don't mind saying that I am a bit uneasy with all this; Brent's voice trembled with emotion, but, well, maybe it will finally give me the answers I have searched for all my life. Maybe I can finally find peace.

They were quiet for a long time. Tam went to Brent and placed his hand on his shoulder, "It will be all right, you come with us tomorrow Brent, and we will find the truth, together."

Brent smiled, "thank you Tam, I would like that."

Fatigue finally overtook them and each retired for the night. Mya flew to the pillow and curled up by Tam's head. Brent suddenly felt a great sense of relief. He drifted off and slept soundly.

Outside the storm howled thru the night. Looking thru the window of the cabin Tobruk was pleased. It had been his task to find and nurture the Right Hand of the Father's Justice to evolution before this world was forced to evolve thru disaster. He had succeeded in his task and had kept his promise to the Father; now he could rest.

REBIRTH

Early the next morning they woke refreshed and filled with an air of expectation. Their fears of the night before had faded away. They ate a big breakfast, Brent wanting to use up any extra food in the frig. Tam and Mya left him and made their way to the spaceship and began the final repairs right away. Brent joined them just as Tam was hauling the metal plate out of the ship. Mya placed the housing over the hole and welded it to the ship. While this was taking place, Tam repaired the wiring and restored the communications center. He sent a message on a narrow band and was answered almost immediately by the minister of the Guild itself; apparently they had been waiting for his call. They ordered him to return to the Companion home world with all haste. Tam filled Mya in on the call and orders. They made everything ready for take off and then returned to the cabin to pack their things.

Brent was concerned about Rusty; he didn't want him to feel he was abandoning him. The red hawk had returned and told Mya to tell him not to worry. He explained that the cat wished to remain here in the forest. Red promised that Rusty would be well taken care of and his remaining years would be happy ones. Brent scratched the cats head for the last time and said goodbye. He thanked the hawk for his protection of the animal.

They gathered their things, returned to the spaceship, and stowed their gear. Ship opened a side panel and a seat slid out for Brent. Tam showed him how to strap in, and Mya flew to a perch that was set up near Tam. He took his seat and pressed several buttons on the console to cloak the ship. Then he turned everything over to Ship; who took off without incident. As soon as they were clear of Earth's Moon, Ship engaged the hyper-drive; the trip took a day and a half.

During that time Brent was amazed at the sights that past them; untold worlds that he somehow knew were inhabited. Questions flew out of him and were answered by Mya or Tam. As they went along things began to look familiar to him. He knew he had never been in space, yet he couldn't help but feel that he had seen all this before.

The High Council contacted them as they approached the Companions' home world. They were expected, and were told to land on the third level of the Guild Hall. Brent saw a beautiful world of lush green forests and high mountains unfold beneath them as they flew to the landing site.

The Guild Master himself met them when they landed. An ancient teacher of the Companions, it was an untold honor not lost on both Tam and Mya. It also gave credence to Mya's supposition that Brent was the Anointed One's Right Hand. Both bowed before the ancient dragon in reverence. Then the old dragon made his way to Brent and lowered his ancient head to him. Brent smiled up at the large dragon without fear; automatically raised his hand and placed it upon his snout, leaning his head in to rub his cheek against his rough old skin. The small act evoked a humming sound from the dragons in attendance.

The old dragon was heard to say; *Ah yes, at last!*

They were ushered into the grand hall. The enormous cavern was filled; ledges jutted out all around the walls of the interior with Companions and Keepers occupying them. The uppermost roof was open to the stars.

So here they stood, their minds had been probed and events of the past few days had been laid bare before all. The Elder Dragon's Keeper stepped forward, bowed, and walked around Brent with a scan of some kind.

He is human indeed; he announced to the entire hall, yet I sense a great power beneath the surface. It was wise of Tobruk to send him to us now. His studies must begin so he may learn to harness that power properly. He must be prepared before approaching the Anointed One.

Several of the other Elders came forward and an impromptu debate began to take place. As everyone stood about discussing the pros and cons of this, Brent backed away and turned his eyes to the tower above.

Are my answers up there? he asked himself.

He turned once more and stared at the group debating; then he looked above again. He took two steps backward, they did not even notice that he had slipped away. So many times he had seen this in dreams; so many times he had awoken just as he reached the top. But this time was different; he could hear a faint voice calling from above. Brent continued backing away from the group and then turned to face the stairs in front of him.

Hesitantly he placed his foot on the first step, and suddenly everything else faded away. He was enveloped in a force field of complete serenity; with each step the feeling increased. He could not see the stunned faces of those below. He could not hear the sudden humming of the Companions on the ledges all around him. He only knew that he had to make it to the top.

Mya, he'll be killed, or worse! Tam started to go after him, but Mya flew to block his way.

No Tam, he will be all right. Mya lowered her head to him; if you go up there, you will die. Brent is following his destiny; he must do this alone. Besides...look and see how he glows!

Tam turned and looked above; it appeared that Brent was on fire.

The old Dragon Master stared above with tears in his eyes. That he was lucky to have lived long enough to see this taking place was more than he could have ever hoped for.

As Brent ascended the stairs he could see a bright light high up ahead. A soft wind began to blow and as it passed thru him he began to see his past lives. He saw how the different choices he had made had had a rippling effect down thru the ages. And the agonizing heartfelt decision to truly forgive the boy who had accidentally caused the death of his entire family had been the final test in his evolution.

His speed increased as he realized the truth and began to understand why the tests were needed. He also saw that the souls who had been his family had agreed to come thru time and again to help this evolution take place. It had all been a part of something much larger.

Finally at the top, he stepped onto the landing and with it seemed to rise up in the air. Before him was the golden egg, it was mammoth, much larger than in his dreams. He seemed to be floating before it. He tried to center himself and relax; as he calmed down he floated back to the landing. He walked about the egg slowly, looking at every inch of it. He wasn't sure what he was supposed to do. Then he took a deep breath, reached out with his right hand, and at the same time thought; *I am here.*

As his hand touched the egg there was a loud cracking sound and a bright light began to emanate thru the cracks.

The humming of the Companions increased and took on a lilting tone. The light became so bright that Brent lifted his arm to shield his eyes.

Suddenly there was a loud *WOOSH* sound and the shell fragments fell away clattering on the stone floor.

Everything went silent.

The Guild Master suddenly realized that they had it all wrong. This was something of a far greater magnitude... this was of the Father.

He fell to his knees and lowered his head, the rest did the same.

Brent opened his eyes and stared dumbfounded. Before him stood a man, a man of such beauty that to gaze upon him was to ache for the unattainable. He had wings, and they were spread wide, beautiful – translucent ... powerful to see.

His head was pointed up at the stars. The creature before him exuded power; his entire body, open for all to see, was rippling muscles and sinew. Somehow Brent knew he was a warrior, but a warrior of the highest level.

In the back of his mind he felt a stirring, a strong feeling that he knew this creature. He took a brief moment in his mind to put everything in perspective; but looking at the man all he could think was... *you are magnificent!*

***I am a mere reflection of my Father's grace...* the man answered quickly in a strong, rich voice that had the accent of a dozen worlds.**

His words echoed within Brent and stirred something to life... his voice so familiar. He gazed at Brent with hazel eyes that bore to his very being.

You have finally returned my brother; this is good for you have been sorely missed. Now search your memory and look into my eyes - and remember!

He spread his wings wide and smiled at Brent, who stared back and looked intently at the man. Searching his memory Brent began to get small glimpses of something.

And the sound, the soft sound of... of wings!

Brent's mind was suddenly flooded with lost memories; awareness gently wrapped his soul as a soft light began to form around him.

I know you!

He shouted with his mind turning towards him.

We have come down thru the ages together.

You were my teacher long ago.

The being smiled and the cavern lit up.

We fought together in the great rebellion; a terrible day for the Father.

Tempers flared, detachment paled;

Ahhh...

I slew in anger in the Father's name!

Sadness flashed across Brent's face and he went down on one knee.

Banishment was mine; start from the beginning, learn again the Father's Way.

Brent slowly stood up and smiled; he understood all now. He had to begin again in order to be able to return home.

You are Tenant, known as Leahcim, Dispenser of the Father's Justice.

And you are Pieta, known as Leahpar, Right Hand of the Father, welcome home!

The person known as Brent suddenly threw his head back and spread his arms wide. A bright light beamed down from above and exploded throughout the large cavern. Ethereal voices shouted ... *Hallelujah!*

Where Brent once stood was now an ethereal being of such beauty that most could not gaze upon him. Wings spread wide; he appeared to be both male and female.

All in the cavern bowed their heads.

**The first being could be heard chuckling in the distance;
*You always knew how to make an entrance kid! Welcome home brother.***

Both flew above on a bolt of lightening.

Tam looked at Mya in surprise...*Mya, they're...*

Yes my dear friend, she chuckled, they most certainly are!