

“Scribe”

by Kellan Meigh

Chapter One

“Sierra Foothills”

The sunlight streaming through the living room curtains woke Jeff Andrews, who had slept the night on the couch again. Rubbing his face to wake up further, he mused that he really should learn to go to bed when he was sleepy. Now he would pay for his indiscretion by the stiffness in his body this September morning.

Some years ago, his wife would have woke him and made him go to bed. That thought saddened him. She had been gone eight years now. Eight very empty years. His mate and his daughter, his only child had been some of the first killed in the initial strike against the United States by Chinese forces. That seemed so long ago.

Getting up and walking across the room then down the hallway, he flipped the wall switch that would turn on the well pump. It was getting to be that time of year when he would have to leave it on continuously to avoid freezing the pipes. At least the pump had been replaced a few years back and this pump should give him another twenty years of service.

Jeff went out onto his back porch and retrieved some split hardwood for the stove. It was too early in the year to go to propane to cook with, since the big cast iron cook stove put out enough heat to cook and warm the cabin with. Looking at what wood was left on the porch, he needed to carry some stock from the wood shed and replenish his handy store.

The graying male carried the split hardwood back inside, where he sat the wood by the stove. He opened the door to the firebox, only to be mildly surprised by a bed of hot coals. Setting the wood on top of the embers, he knew they would catch in a few moments. In a little while, the stove would be hot enough to cook on.

A trip back through his home brought him to the front door, where he put on a jacket and some pac boots that he kept handy. He went outside and walked out to the road to check his mailbox, hopeful that a delivery had been made. Service had been spotty, ever since the Reformed United States Army, a rebel group in his eyes and the eyes of the government, had moved into the area.

The reason for the influx of army troops was simple; an alien race known as the Elazi had landed on Earth not more than two years ago. They had touched down on an abandoned Air Force Base near Merced, California and set up shop. Well, not before they had contacted the Pentagon and negotiated an amicable rental agreement. They had plenty of gold, silver and platinum to trade with.

The Elazi had claimed that they were scientists and historians. They explained that they studied races across the galaxy, finding the 'Hoo-mans', the human race very interesting. There weren't many of them and some speculation said they were less than one thousand in number. The Elazi never said exactly what their true numbers were.

Jeff leaned against his empty mail box and remembered watching the television on the day that the Elazi showed off to the world, a desalination plant that could be built for peanuts and was very efficient. They worked with Pacific Gas and Electric, of all entities to set up these plants along the West coast, providing clean water where the existing supplies had become marginal, at best. The aliens then showed our agricultural specialists how to mitigate selenium buildup. They explained that their planet had suffered the same fate so they felt obligated to share that information with us.

While most of the world's leaders were overjoyed by the presence of the other-worldly visitors, there were those who were not. In fact, several groups spend untold amounts of money to publicly demand the Elazi leave, post-haste. Protesters, young and old alike, were at the gates of the Elazi's rented base on a constant twenty-four hour basis, using picket signs and public address systems to voice their discontent.

. . . and there were those few that took their demands to a new level.

Army Brigadier General Abraham Wortham Calhoun, set for forced retirement, spent a year ferreting out enough troops that felt the same way that he did about the Elazi. He mustered his unsanctioned army, went to the aliens and told them to leave or else. When they explained that they would leave as soon as they were done with their study of our race, that wasn't good enough for the rogue General. The first shot fired, a purloined M-198 Howitzer taken from a Bakersfield National Guard unit, hit the Elazi ship square in her flank. The resulting explosion was heard hundreds of miles away and created a crater almost a mile across.

A side effect of the explosion was the triggering of multiple catastrophic earthquake fault movements up and down California, particularly on the Hayward fault on the East side of San Francisco bay. Every city sitting on or near that fault suffered major damage and loss of life. In just moments, millions of lives were irreparably changed or lost. That was the action that turned most of the public against the Reformed United States Army. The news media picked up on this and ran with it, calling for the disbandment of this rogue army. For some unknown reason, the United States government would not take action.

Some said it was a reluctance to pit brother against brother, again.

Three months later, the lead Elazi liaison Sanmet Krol, in a televised conference, told the rogue Army commander that he expected a full apology from him for the actions against the Elazi and he did indicate that he meant business. The General in turn told Ambassador Krol to 'stuff it' on national television.

Jeff remembered watching that conference, and he thought about how easy it was to read Ambassador Krol's reactions to that statement. It was very clear that the alien understood the concept of 'stuffing it'. His facial expressions and his body language betrayed him, showing the world that he was not happy with the General. Not at all.

The Elazi race were not humanoid, in the literal sense. They were bipedal, with a head, two arms and two legs but that's where the differences began. They were furry, seeming to be a cross between a wolf and a cougar. They walked plantigrade and they had claws on their hands and feet. The Elazi also had cat-like tails that came down to their knees or a bit longer, depending on

the individual. Their coloration ranged from grays to tawny browns on to some that were a smoky gray-black.

When Ambassador Krol was told to 'stuff it', he actually laid his ears back, like an angry cat and he bared his teeth just slightly. It was interesting that as a whole, most of them spoke good English, or American Standard, as they had termed it. Jeff remembered how the Ambassador had carefully articulated his words, letting the General know that he was fully aware of his rogue status and the United States government had informed the Ambassador that they would stay out of any disagreements between the Elazi and the General.

General Calhoun then told the Ambassador that there wasn't a thing he could do about being thrown off the planet, short of declaring war against the Reformed United States Army. That was when the Ambassador stood up, straightened his robes and clearly stated, "Bring it on, Bitch."

Within two hours tops, eleven more Elazi ships landed in various locations throughout the Central California valley, bringing more than forty-seven thousand well-armed soldiers to the battle.

Jeff stopped on the way back to his home to stoop down and straighten a few rocks that lined his front walk. It appeared as if some deer had been through his front yard last eve and in the process they may have nudged the rocks aside to seek the moss and lichen growing on them.

Still kneeling, he looked up at his home. Jeff and his wife had built this log 'cabin' themselves, using a kit that he had ordered to his specifications. It was a two story house, unusual for a log structure and it was made almost exclusively of peeled cedar logs. He smiled a wistful smile as he remembered his late wife helping him to put the structure together, using a worn-out boom crane they had purchased down in Sacramento for a song. It was still parked out back and if coaxed just right, it would still run, a testament to his skills at maintaining his equipment.

Running his hands through his salt-and-pepper hair, he stood and headed back towards the house. He stopped to look at the right-hand railing for the steps, noting it needed to be re-secured to the newell post. Well, the hand rails were out in the elements, after all.

After looking at the choices that presented themselves for his breakfast, he once again just made some scrambled eggs and toast for his meal. Jeff didn't know if it was the weather that was causing it or something else but he had been depressed as of late. Maybe his neighbor Stan Galli had been right. The old, white-haired widower had told him that he needed to find a female friend to share his time with. Maybe Stan was correct on that matter. At least that would give him someone to talk to, someone to share his thoughts with.

After cleaning up his breakfast dishes, Jeff rounded up a pad and pencil, then he went to his larder to check on his stock. He knew a storm was blowing in a few days from now so if he was low on something, he needed to go into the city of Auburn today. He had been snowed in a few times in the last five years so he knew he didn't want to try to drive down the gravel roads once

they were covered in snow.

Entering the larder, he took stock of his canned goods, concerned that he didn't have enough to last the winter. Especially if his younger brother Harvey came up to visit again, unannounced. The powdered milk was still in good supply, sufficient stores of flour, salt and sugar but maybe he needed to get some additional baking soda and baking flour. Another bottle of vanilla wouldn't hurt along with a large sack of dried beans.

Jeff went to his cold store, built under the back of the cabin, and checked his meats that he had put inside. There was a quarter of a buck that he and his neighbor had taken with a bow out by Lake Clementine, a half a hog, cut up and wrapped in freezer paper, and at least fifty pounds of buffalo, a present from Stan Galli.

On his way back inside, he checked the diesel tank for his generator, making sure that it was close to full. In case the power went out, his gen-set would come on line, keeping his cold store, refrigerator and well pump going. For the rest of the house, candles, oil lanterns or flashlights could get him around. A fire in the fireplace or the cast iron cooking stove could keep the house warm in a pinch.

Jeff had dressed for the day, taking a bit of time to clean up and change into something more suitable to wear out in public. On the way out to his transportation, he took his cold weather parka, gloves and toboggan cap out of the closet, intending to bring them with him. He knew a storm would warrant them, should it blow in early.

Making sure the back door was locked, he walked through his back yard to the barn, which served as his garage. Sliding the front door open, he smiled wistfully at the sight in front of him. There was his 1997 International Harvester Corporation 1210 pickup, still on jack stands where he had left it last spring. He had removed the Mat-track assemblies from it when the snow season ended but since he had his late wife's truck to drive, the need to put the conventional tires back on his truck had never presented itself.

His lost love's truck sat next his, a 1966 Ford F250 crew cab four-wheel-drive. A model affectionately known as a 'High-Boy' and still highly desirable by Ford truck collectors. He opened the driver's door, put his extra garments inside, then he climbed aboard.

Jeff fondly remembered doing the restoration on this truck, a three year labor of love that his late wife Terri Mae had helped out with, even when she was pregnant with their daughter Misti Lynette. Now they were both gone. That was one reason why he had held on to this beast; it was a reminder of them that prevented him from selling it.

He pushed in the clutch, made sure the transmission was in neutral, then he turned the key to 'On'. Since they had re-powered the truck with a Cummins 4BT diesel engine, it was necessary to allow the glowplugs to heat up. Once the little red light on the dash had went out, he pressed the starter button. The powerful little diesel started right up and settled down quickly to a smooth for a four cylinder diesel idle. Well, relatively smooth.

Jeff pulled the truck out of the barn, closed the door and put a padlock on the hasp. It was a security measure that he had began to take, ever since that rogue army had pushed into the area. Not that it would stop them, but at least they would maybe think twice before breaking in.

While Jeff drove down the gravel road that would intersect Foresthill Road, the main way back into Auburn, he enjoyed the late fall scenery. He fondly remembered the long walks in the forest with Terri, taking an all-day hike just to have a lunch on some hilltop with a vista. They had done that maybe once a month or more, even after Misti had been born. That was something that he had not done since their passing.

He slowed as he went past a small English Walnut grove, one that existed at this altitude only because the small valley caused a micro-climate that the trees liked. The stand of trees had most likely had been planted by someone, since the regularity in spacing was just a bit too consistent. One tree in particular had a branch that seemed just right to hang a tire swing out of, a thought that Terri had come up with but had never acted upon. Maybe he would do that some day, he thought. For her.

He made it down to Foresthill Road without incident, stopped at the stop sign, then made his right turn onto the pavement. Once on the blacktop, he could get up to a good cruising speed and shift into overdrive to conserve fuel. He always did that just before the first bend in the road, about a mile from the juncture with Old Auburn-Foresthill road. He made his shift at the curve in the road, then immediately shifted back down and applied the brakes. Up ahead, the road held a disturbing sight.

“What in the hell happened here?” Jeff said out loud to himself, looking at the wreckage strewn across the roadway. What appeared to be the remains of an army HMMWV, more commonly known as a Hummvee, was blocking one lane of the road, his lane. One more Hummvee, a unit set up to launch Raytheon surface-to-air missiles, was off the road on the other side and clearly damaged beyond use.

The vehicles and the pavement all bore the tell-tale scorch marks of being hit by Elazi energy weapons. The vehicles also had neatly punched holes almost six inches in diameter, clear through the thick armor, signs of the use of Elazi anti-equipment weapons. Those weapons were what could be considered simple but very effective electromagnetic rail-guns. The tubular composite projectile weighed mere ounces but the velocity was staggering, approaching four times the speed of sound. When it hit something, it was just like a sharp leather punch against good tooling leather. It created a very neat hole, even in a cast iron engine block.

The carnage before him explained the sounds he had heard last evening and that bothered him. The fighting was getting entirely too close to his home for comfort. Not that he had to fear the Elazi, for they were not hostile to the civilian populace. It was the rogue Reformed United States Army that one had to fear. They were known to loot homes for anything they felt would be of use to them and there was some talk that some soldiers had taken to raping female civilians while looting.

All he knew was, woe be to the soldier that thinks they could walk away with his belongings. If

there was one thing he knew, it was their mindset. Being former military had ensured that any intruders into his home would be in a major world of hurt. Civilian or rogue soldier, it did not matter.

Jeff made it into town without further incident so he turned right onto Lincoln Way where he could hit the General Store first. Back before the China-American war, Auburn was a thriving city. The economy had collapsed during the conflict, so it was now a ghost-town in the outskirts. Only the central part of Auburn still supported a retail zone, and not a big one at that.

Before the war, he would have 'One Stop' shopped at a Safeway or Raley's but today, Jeff would make several stops, the first one being the business known as The Auburn General Store, Inc. He turned into the parking lot, found a space close to the door and parked his truck. He enjoyed visiting with the couple that ran the place because they seemed very indifferent to the war in general, as if it didn't bother them.

Walking through the front door, he was quickly greeted by one of the owners, Torvald Svensen. The tall, blond-haired Dane always seemed to have a good word for his customers. It was odd that he complained about the cold on occasion, though. He had said he was from Denmark, despite his almost lack of a Northern Atlantic accent. Jeff was sure the weather was at least as cold there as it was here in the Sierras.

“Good morning, Jeff!” the huge man offered up, waving at him from the bulk grains area. “Hey, did you see any signs of fighting on your way here?” he asked.

“Up on Foresthill Road, East of the junction with Old Foresthill Road.” the shorter man replied. “Looks like the RUSA had their collective behinds handed to them. Two vehicles destroyed.” he added, taking a moment to walk over to Torvald and shake his hand.

“The Elazi have moved into the area, using the old Ford dealership as a base of operations.” the muscular blond man offered up. “They asked if we had a doctor familiar with the area. I offered up that you might be asked to help them. I know you're retired but it might not hurt to keep a good rapport with them.”

“You're right, my friend. Did they give a reason for needing my services?” Jeff asked.

“The soldier that I spoke with wasn't very fluent in English, I'm afraid. He kept apologizing, stating he was still learning the language. Might have been one of the soldiers that came after the failed conference.” They were joined shortly by Torvald's wife, who added her thoughts.

“I've met one of the soldiers that had a difficult time with the language.” the other owner of the business interjected. “Good morning, Jeff. Sorry if I interrupted you two.” Victoria Svensen added.

Jeff turned and smiled at her, which could not be helped. Her warm, infectious smile almost forced you to smile back. She was middle-Eastern by heritage but she spoke with a slight Wisconsin accent, of all things. Victoria also moved with a grace that Jeff had never observed

before, sometimes walking up to him in the store so quietly that he never heard her approach. Maybe that's why Torvald sometimes referred to her as his 'Tigress.'

Her copper-brown eyes twinkled as she continued with her thoughts. "So, how may we help you today?" she proffered up. "We found a real good deal on dried pinto beans and bulk wild rice, if you're interested."

"I do need beans." Jeff agreed.

"Well, you might need a basket." Victoria put forth. "Here, let me go get you one."

"She is such a gem." Torvald stated as his wife went to the checkout area to get a cart for their customer. "Oh, yeah. If you're feeling generous, you might swing by the old Ford dealership and maybe see what they need. You know, their medics aren't as knowledgeable on Earth medicines as I would have thought they would be."

"I have heard that." Jeff put forth. "Yeah, I'll stop and see what I can do for them before I go over to the Dairy Shack."

As Jeff drove toward his next destination, he thought about the information related to him by Torvald. As far as he knew, these Elazi possessed knowledge far beyond the human race, so what would they need with his help? Well, there had to be a reason for them to ask for assistance.

He slowed down as he approached the former Ford dealership, noting to himself that a few Elazi soldiers were patrolling the immediate area. They were all heavily armed and seemed to be on alert for some reason or another. One soldier standing on the corner of the lot might have been taking his picture while another standing with the first soldier was using what might have been a two-way radio of some type while he watched him drive by.

Jeff was curious about one thing, though. These soldiers were all wearing a full coverage articulated hard armor, obviously meant for battle either in the atmosphere or possibly in a vacuum. Each suit seemed to have a ring right above the shoulders that a helmet could interface with. At the moment, they wore what could be described as an open-face motorcycle helmet for cranial protection.

As he approached the driveway to the temporary Elazi digs, a soldier stopped him. The Elazi slipped his rifle around to hang on his back by the sling, then approached his driver's window. Jeff rolled down the window and waited for the soldier to speak.

The soldier lifted his visor, smiled in the way of the Elazi, and then spoke. "Are you Jeffrey Andrews?" he asked in very clear English.

"That would be me." he replied.

The soldier nodded. "We have been expecting you. Please follow the red line to the parking area where you will be directed into a parking space. If an air vehicle begins to lift off, please stay in

your vehicle until the craft is airborne.” The gray Elazi then motioned toward the line in question.

Jeff followed the red line, a freshly painted marker, through what must have been the service writer's area then around behind the former sales offices. Another Elazi, armed only with a sidearm, motioned him into a space between two white Ford Excursions that bore alien markings painted onto them. The only thing in English was a small “Elazi Staff Only” marking by the license plate.

“Tammat Trax, Second Medical Division, Sir.” the alien introduced himself, extending his right hand to greet Jeff. The human took the Elazi's hand, who had a very firm grip, and gave him a handshake in return. “We have been waiting for you, Sir. Our chief medical technician wishes to discuss an important issue with you, Sir.”

“You can drop the 'Sir', Tammat.” Jeff replied. “I've been retired from our military for almost six years. Call me Jeff, please.”

“Yes, Sir.” the tawny colored male stated, then corrected himself. “Sorry, Jeff. It's just that we have been drilled from the beginning of our military service to call all military and former military as Sir or Ma'am.”

“You speak very good English.” Jeff commented.

“Thank you, S . . . Jeff. I have studied your language extensively, using my passage time from our home world to train my mind to hear, speak and read your languages. Since I knew I was coming to the American Western Coast, I have studied English, Spanish and French.” Tammat related to the human. “We have set up our medical facilities through here,” he directed, motioning to the doors that had more Elazi markings on them.

Jeff followed the alien into the building, stopping just inside the door to allow Tammat to stow his weapon in a secure locker. They went down a hall and into what had once been a very decent sized break room. The soldiers had converted it into their examination room, using the cubicle panels found in other parts of the building to cordon off six areas that became individual examination and treatment stations.

They were momentarily joined by a smoky gray male, slightly shorter and a little stockier than Tammat. He was dressed in what must have been a their version of medical scrubs, only in a very pale violet color.

“I am Rommer Kraf, chief medical physician.” the Elazi stated in very passable English. “I do hope you have not been inconvenienced by coming here at our request.” the doctor added.

“Jeff Andrews,” he replied, offering his hand to the doctor. Rommer accepted, giving Jeff a firm handshake in return. “I heard you were asking for a local doctor to consult with.”

“Yes, we were hoping to consult an Earth doctor.” Doctor Kraf agreed. “We have been having an issue with some of the soldier's feet. I was in hopes you could assist with the treatment. Come this way.”

They went to the middle exam area on the left side of the room where a soldier sat on an examining table. Well, things must be fairly common among sentient races. That soldier, a gray colored male, was wearing what appeared to be a mesh body stocking over an abbreviated boxer brief. His armor was neatly placed nearby on a shelving unit that seemed to be made to hold the various components. The doctor took a moment to introduce the human to the warrior.

“Jeff Andrews, this is Kemmet Blane. Kemmet, this is Doctor Andrews. Just to clarify something for you Doctor Andrews, Kemmet would be a Corporal by your Army ranking conventions.”

“Nice to meet you, Doctor Andrews.” the pale gray soldier offered up.

“Nice to meet you Kemmet. You can drop the 'Doctor' title, though. I'm retired now.” Jeff replied.

The alien doctor spoke up. “Kemmet has this foot trouble that is plaguing a good number of our soldiers. Please show Jeff Andrews the problem.” Doctor Kraf directed.

The gray one slipped off his sock and placed his foot on the table where they could see it better. Doctor Kraf aimed an examination light at the appendage and gently brushed the fur on top of Kemmet's foot, right by his toes, backwards. He then carefully spread the toes so Jeff could take a look.

“There is something that has infected the foot, causing itching and a burning sensation.” Doctor Kraf related. “This is new to us as we have never encountered this before.” The skin below the sparse fur was reddened with some areas that had white, flaky skin present.

Jeff frowned, giving some thought to this. “Well, it could be what we call 'Athlete's Foot', Doctor. It's a fungal infection that loves warm, humid conditions. I would bet the shoes on your armored suits don't breathe very well.”

“You would be right.” Doctor Kraf agreed. “So, if we procured better footwear, this will go away?”

“You will also need to treat the fungal infection.” Jeff countered. “There are over-the-counter medications that will help to rid your soldiers of the infection. Daily's Pharmacy down the street will have something that could be effective. Your soldiers also need to keep their feet clean and dry to keep the infection knocked down.”

Jeff thought about his conversation with the Elazi doctor, thinking that this race of beings had a lot in common with the human race. The one thing that struck him as being odd was the comment that Rommer had made concerning the weather. Apparently, they thought Earth was the most humid and wet planet that they had ever been to. It sounded as if Elazia was a very dry planet, since it only snowed on one pole, their Southern pole, and there were no belts of forests like there were on Earth. Tammat had offered up that if he were given a choice, he would stay on Earth. Apparently the greenery and the rain, for some reason, seemed to draw him here.

He had also been offered a meal by the doctor so the old adage, 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do', came to mind. They offered him a stew, spicy but not too spicy with a cornbread they had adopted as one of their favorite Earth foods. They also seemed to have developed an affinity for several flavors of Jarritos® Mexican sodas.

As he drove home along Foresthill Road, Jeff smiled when he thought about their asking if they could contact him via 'Cellular Device' if the need arose. The Elazi were very resourceful, having taken to using cell phones as a secondary form of communication. The more he thought about it, the more he suspected that these beings were very much like the human race. They even had compassion toward their enemy, the Reformed United States Army. They tried their best to only discourage them, not injure or kill the antagonists. Rommer and Tammat had both expressed great sadness for those that had been killed on both sides of this conflict.

Jell chuckled to himself, thinking about how Torvald and Victoria had been surprised when he returned to their store with Rommer, Tammat and several other Elazi, looking to purchase boots and socks for the Second Medical Division. They had measured up at least a dozen sets of Elazi feet, making a discovery that they would need 'E' width shoes.

The aliens had tried on a number of boots before they decided on one particular style, a Keen™ Pittsburgh steel-toed hiking-style work boot. The Elazi all liked the fit and it worked with their hard armor, the cuff of the boot ending up just short of the bottom of the leg armor. Torvald had placed a call to Keen, just to make sure the boots could be delivered. The representative of the company seemed overjoyed at the thought of supplying a boot to the aliens and confirmed they were available in the warehouses, all three color patterns in the sizes requested. Victoria had thanked Jeff for bringing the Elazi to them, since the initial order was for over three hundred pairs of boots, pre-paid by Rommer in cash.

Jeff was enjoying the day, driving with the windows down, the fall landscape colors being a delight to the eyes. Up ahead, he observed more RUSA vehicles and what appeared to be a roadblock. Knowing a way around this, he turned off into a neighbor's driveway and then turned onto a fire road. This would take him up on top of the ridge and eventually, to Old Foresthill-Auburn Road.

He took it slow and careful, listening for sounds of fighting. Eventually he heard an Elazi craft fly overhead, headed in the same general direction he was headed. It was an odd craft, having small helicopter-like propellers on each of the four corners. They had shrouds around them, probably to enhance the thrust and improve the vectoring ability of the craft. A few turns later, he could see down into the valley between the roads and that was the location of the fighting in progress.

The Elazi were in the East end of the small valley almost right below him, hunkered down behind some heavy granite rock escarpments. The RUSA were in the Western end of the valley, using the woods for cover. The human army didn't seem to be heavily armed, the biggest firearm sounding like a fifty caliber machine gun. They also had mortars that they were lobbing at the aliens. Jeff pulled up into some brush to partially disguise his vehicle, then he took his Savage hunting rifle in thirty magnum caliber from behind the seat and headed down to get a closer look.

Jeff could see that the Elazi forces were using a rail gun to 'open up' the forest, reducing the RUSA's cover. They were being very careful to not injure any of the RUSA soldiers and it was about that time that he noticed what appeared to be an armored female Elazi, holding what might have been a video camera. If anything, she might have been reporting on the war but for whom?

Things took a serious turn when an Apache helicopter flew overhead, strafing the Elazi position heavily. They retaliated, taking a few shots at it with their energy weapons. None of the shots made contact but it seemed to warn the helicopter off. The Elazi craft then made his strafing run, firing a centerline-mounted rail gun right into the middle of the antagonists.

The RUSA responded by lobbing more mortars in the general direction of the Elazi, followed by the Apache helicopter making another strafing run. That Elazi craft reappeared, chasing off the RUSA craft with several close misses from their rail gun. A much larger alien craft made its appearance, making a number of strafing runs with multiple hull-mounted energy weapons. When over a dozen Apaches showed up to counter them, the two alien craft proceeded to carefully incapacitate all of them save for one, which might have been accidentally destroyed.

The fighting seemed to be over when the larger craft landed and took on the Elazi contingent. They took a few moments to check for injured RUSA soldiers, then the two craft left the area in a hurry. Jeff waited for a bit, just to make sure that he had not been spotted, then he made his way back to his truck. It didn't take too long for him to follow the fire road back out to Old Foresthill-Auburn Road, then on back home.

Jeff pulled around behind the house and unloaded his groceries, taking a few moments to restoke the fire in his stove. He checked the back seat for anything that he might have left behind, locked the doors and went inside to fix dinner. He would move the truck back into the barn after he had eaten.

Deciding to fix a can of soup to warm up with, he put a pot on the stove, opened a can of his favorite soup and poured it into the cooking vessel. Adding a bit of pepper, he stirred it some and then went to look out the front door at the weather front coming in.

Standing in the doorway, it looked pretty bad to him. The clouds were very dark and tall, a sure sign of heavy snow. The wind seemed to carry the warning smells of snow, too. He was musing about the weather, watching the first snow flakes fall, when a hand came from behind him, covering his mouth and something cold was pressed into his neck.

"Step back inside," the female voice demanded, pulling him inside. "Close the door," she told him, waiting until he had shut the door before she turned him to face her. It was that female Elazi that had been at the engagement.

"What is this all about?" Jeff asked, looking to see that although she had a sidearm in her possession, it was not aimed at him.

"I am injured," the buff-colored female replied, right before her cobalt blue eyes rolled back in her head and she passed out on his living room floor.