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“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Twelve

“Saboteur”

The hastily assembled detachment, lead by Hallett Trasc arrived at the hatchway to the number seven port systems chase-way zone. What they had anticipated was a hatch that would open, maybe with some difficulty or some minor coercion. What they found was worse; someone had welded multiple thick, metal tabs between the door and the frame, preventing unassisted entry.

“Oh No!” The tall, solid black Elazi male blurted out.

“I'll get a torch,” Marlett put forth, turning to head to a nearby maintenance room. He was halted by his superior.

“No, I'll open this hatch.” Hal retorted. “Give me your rifle.”

“Hal, that's not safe . . .” the younger trooper started to point out.

“Oh, I know that.” the taller one put forth. “I know it's not safe to fire a projectile weapon in a ship under way but I want that hatchway open . . . NOW! That is Na'Kesta's daughter in there and I will not lose her *OR* Jeffrey on my watch!!”

Trooper Blane'lan gave his weapon to his superior and took cover behind a butress in the hall. He heard the powerpack charge the weapon, followed by the distinct sound of a round being discharged into the ship's hull. That was followed by five more discharges and a General Alarm beginning to sound, probably due to the weapons discharge being detected by the ship's sensors.

Hallett put the weapons' sling over his shoulder and spun the wheel to undog the hatch, tugging at the bracing violently to gain access to the zone in question. Once inside, he went to a closet to break out a survival helmet and breathing pack.

“Marlett, get me access to that ductwork!” the lead security expert growled as he dug through the locker to find what he was looking for. Some being had used this area for excess storage, moving all of the survival equipment to the back of the closet. *That* irritated him to no end.

“Hal, I have a problem.” Orange Detachment's 'Jack-of-all-trades' stated sourly. “I'm going to have to hack my way in. We're locked out by access code One-Alpha-One. That code belongs to the Ships Officer In Charge, High Commander Dunmin Dorsett!”

Trooper Trasc blanched; “I don't care if that code belongs to *Od'Tra The Wise*, hack it! Get us in

there!!”

“As you command!” Marlett snapped out, turning back to the console to jam in code just as fast as his fingers could go.

While Hallett Trasc put on the emergency survival suit, helmet and air tank, he thought about the possibility that Na'Krista was already dead. If so, there was a being or beings on this ship that would pay dearly for their indiscretions. As it was part of his post to know what was going on, he had an idea who might be behind all of this. If it turned out to be true, that would shake Elazia to her core.

Na'Krista had turned around to face Jeff after noting the air pressure had stopped decreasing and it was holding at a barely tolerable level. She worked her hands around his waist, then she made a request;

“Jeff, hold me tightly.” she requested.

“Well, okay, if you want me to.”

“No, I can't reach the electrical breakers behind you unless you do that for me.” she pointed out. “If I turn off a sufficient number of circuits, they will know where we are.”

“Ah, I see.” Jeff hugged her tightly and leaned back, helping to get her hands near the switches behind him. He heard her tripping a breaker after breaker, then she reached to his right as far as she could.

“Got it!” she blurted out, trying to bring something in between them. After a short struggle, she finally managed to wrangle a floppy yellow object about eighteen inches square into view. “This is an arc mat used to protect a worker from arc flash when an open panel is still energized.” she explained. “Put it over that vent above the door. It might stop the air from being evacuated.”

“Here goes nothing,” Jeff said, pressing his lover back into the door to reach his objective. “You'll have to hug me this time,” he asked, waiting until she had done so to place the mat. Just as she had predicted, the difference in air pressure had done the trick, pressing the flexible material deeply into the vent grille.

“Thank the Gods,” Na'Krista muttered as she leaned into Jeff's chest, relieved that a temporary solution to their problem had been executed. Looking at the increasing numbers on her wrist display, she began to sob quietly.

“Sweetheart? Are you okay?” Jeff inquired.

“We seem to be safe for the moment.” she replied in a small voice before she looked up at her future *One Love*. “We are certainly stuck in here, but an air leak down an electrical conduit must be supplying enough air flow to return the pressure in this compartment to a survivable level.”

“So, we're good for now?”

“I think so.” Krista replied. “If we open our suit closures just a bit, we can let the suits deflate and gain some room in here.”

Jeff popped the seal on her suit and she reciprocated, allowing the one-piece garments to return to their original size. That gave them quite a bit of room, now that they no longer looked like inflated pool toys.

“Now what?” Jeff asked.

“We sit tight, as you would say, and wait for our rescue.”

Na'Krista leaned back against the door and relaxed, glad things were stable for the moment. She almost felt like they were set up, however by someone that held ill feelings toward either Jeff, her or her family. One thing was clear to her; she had family, friends and allies on this ship so the word was going to go out. She would offer a generous sum to the one that brought the being responsible to justice. That was as long she didn't ferret out the responsible party or parties first.

Hallett waited patiently while his technician attempted to override the safety interlocks on the hatch he wanted to access. Even if they could gain control over the locks, there was still the issue of the severely diminished atmospheric pressure in the ducting. The crew that was attempting access toward the stern were dealing with the same situation, according to the information he had just received.

While he communicated with Orange Two who was at bulkhead one-fifty, a sound, a familiar female voice behind him, garnered his attention. Turning to confirm his suspicions, he observed Na'Kesta, already suited up and she putting on her emergency helmet interface.

“Ambassador, you are not going in with m . . .” She derailed his train of thought with a Mother's glare.

“Hal, you want to try to stop me?” she said in a level, strained voice.

“Kess, I don't think it wise . . .” He was once again interrupted by her glare.

“Hal, I know the dangers. Anything could happen to us in there. Despite the obvious perils, I will be going in there with you.”

Meanwhile, Marlett was busy trying to hack his way into the area of the ships' controls that were responsible for keeping environmental conditions optimum. He knew if he stayed with it, the proper code would reveal itself. He had placed a call to ship's security so they could find High Commander Dunmin Dorsett. Once found, the commander would be able to override the lockouts in place.

“Trooper Blane'lan?” the comm panel crackled forth.

“Trooper Blane'lan here.” the solid black Elazi male replied while he held down the 'Talk' button.

“Trooper, Blane'lan, we have a situation. Commander Dorsett is in his stateroom, unconscious and he is not responding to medical treatment.”

“Understood.” Marlett replied. He then garnered the attention of his superior. “Hal, we are totally farked.”

“What's wrong?” Hallett asked.

“Well, Commander Dorsett is unconscious so he can't give us his override code.” That information seemed to really upset the lead of Orange Detachment.

“Marlett, you have ten units of time to get me in there before I just blow a hole in the ductwork.”

“Yes, Sir!” the younger trooper shouted back, turning back to his console and the business at hand. If they had to blow the ductwork, he wondered if Hal would let him do that. Marlett had always wanted to blow a hole in something aboard a ship.

Jo-Linn stepped back from the prone Elazi male on the floor, shaking the hand that had sucker-punched the individual laying before her. She probably would have let the being leave her work area if he had just answered her question concerning his presence. He had only antagonized her when he had failed to answer her and decided instead to take a swipe at her with a vibroknife.

If there was one thing she hated, it was beings using her work area without her permission. There were only a few dozen people authorized to access her work stations and this joker was not one of them. The only thing she hated worse than that was some short-sighted scum that thought they knew how to fight in close quarters with a weapon that the bearer obviously did not know how to use.

“Who are you and what gives you the right to be in here?” she growled out as she bent down and picked up the Bil weapon. “Don't make me kick your head off, you *Dosh'ranaa!* I might just do it anyway, since you sliced a hole in my favorite work uniform!!” she added.

“Fark you, *B'Taagh!*” the male spat back at her from his face-down prone position. “Back off or I'll kill . . .” That Elazi had made a bad choice, mouthing off to a Pak'Saa'naani female with a bad temper. His rant turned into a scream when she stomped on his right hand, breaking numerous bones in the process.

Jo-Linn quickly moved to straddle the male and took great satisfaction in pulling that broken hand up in between his shoulder blades. She then put the knife to his throat and allowed it to go into fighting oscillation mode before she began to interrogate him.

“Now, who are you? You have five moments to answer, then I begin shaving your throat with this knife. I won't make any guarantees that you will not get cut.”

“I will die first.” he stated rather matter-of-factly. “Go try your luck elsewhere.”

“I don't know who you're working for, but I'll find out.” she commented, right before she twisted the wrist of his broken appendage. That garnered a shriek from her captive. “Well, talk or I start cutting.”

“You don't have the guts for it.” the smokey male put forth.

“You're wrong.” Jo-Linn retorted. “I was a Sa'naan Elite mercenary, trained by the Sa'naani military. I do not have a problem with taking you apart, bit by bit. You know that old saying; once a mercenary, always a mercenary.”

The mysterious male started to make a smart remark but his thoughts were derailed by the soft sizzle of an Amp-Light Knife being activated. It was a small device, easily hidden on one's person and they were so lethal, they were banned in several solar systems.

The body of the device looked like a small flashlight but it projected a beam of highly amplified light about three hand spans outward from the tip. That beam could cut through just about anything and flesh would certainly show it no resistance. He could feel the heat from the beam on the side of his face when Jo-Linn 'accidentally' scorched the pelt on his cheek.

“I'm going to count to three, and if you're not chattering away by the time I reach the end of my count, I'm gonna start cutting.” she put forth in a malevolent tone.

“Alright! My name is As'Gossen Dessan'Lan and I work for The Tah'Nash! They ordered me to . . . to . . . Gah!!” He hesitated, like it wasn't possible for him to unveil his orders.

“Ordered you to do what? Are you the reason for the alert tone on my consoles to be sounding?”

“I . . . I can't say.” he stated in a strained voice. “Conditioning! They made it so I can't say! I cannot force myself to say it!!”

“How about I recondition you? I'll start by cutting your tail off.”

“No! I can't say!!” Gossen blurted out. “Turn me over to security!! Do Not Torture Me!! It will kill me!!” he shouted in a panicked tone of voice. It was clear the Elazi male feared something, whether it be death or Jo-Linn's ability to torture him mercilessly.

“Security!” a male voice shouted just as Jo-Linn's area was swarmed by almost a dozen Security Specialists.

“I have him. Says he's with the Tah'Nash.” the spotted femme put forth as she climbed off of the unlucky male, then dragged Gossen roughly to his feet.

“Tah'Nash . . .” the tall solid white Elazi male mused. “We have a problem, then. If we push him for information, he'll die. Maybe we should just vent him out an airlock. No use wasting time keeping him in the jail block.”

“No!” Gossen blurted out. “Listen, you might be able to probe my m . . .”

A shot rang out, sounding like an old style percussion, explosive powder-driven projectile weapon. The top of Gossen's head exploded, then he collapsed like a rag doll.

“Find the shooter!” the lead Security Tech shouted to his detachment, right before he took Jo-Linn roughly to the floor behind a console. Once they stopped moving and Jo collected herself, she rubbed her nose, since being caught off-guard like that didn't give her a chance to prepare for a rough landing on the floor.

“Thanks, Gil. I needed that.” she said flatly.

“Sorry, Jo. I was just trying to keep you safe.”

“I knew you were, Gil. Next time, a tiny little heads-up, please?”

They both looked over at the deceased male who was bleeding out on the floor. After watching the pool of blood grow larger and larger, Jo-Linn broke the silence.

“So, can I get a clean-up detail to take care of this mess?”

“When we deem the area clear.” Gillat Deen'lan agreed. “Um, we have an emergency over in the port number seven chaseway corridor. Seems the ductwork was sealed off in a fifty bulkhead zone and the atmosphere is being evacuated from it.”

“That's not good,” the female Pak'Sa'nanni commented, “My main station can control those functions if an override code is used.”

“that's why I was on my way down here.” Gil informed Jo. “Can you do something with that issue?”

“As soon as you quit hugging me and let me up.” she retorted as she rolled over on her back to look up at Gillat. “Not that I mind you holding me like this, it's just that the floor is so hard, unlike my bed.”

“Uh, yes, I'll let you up.” he offered sheepishly while he moved off of the femme below him. “I think it might be clear, now.”

Gil looked around the corner of the console, just to make sure his detachment had swept the area thoroughly. He helped the Pak femme to her hooves, then provided an escort to the station in question. Once they had arrived, Jo-Linn looked at the display that was still scrolling line after line of commands.

“We have an internal looper running.” she said while she tapped furiously on her console in

hopes of stopping it. Turing to a secondary console, Technician Farnissen brought up a diagnostic program and started it, hoping to locate this looping program.

“Tah'Nash?” Gil inquired.

“I would bet my drinking money on that.” Jo replied. “Yup, looper in the environmental sub-routine. Here, let's try this,” she muttered, using a high level command to stop the routine. When that failed, she turned to the Security Specialist. “Gil, you didn't see this.”

“What? No, I was cleaning my rifle. Didn't see a thing.”

“Thank you, Gil”

Jo opened a drawer under the console with a high security key, then she selected a specific memory cartridge from a holder. Slipping it into the receiver beside the keyboard, she launched a program that was stored on that cartridge. She carefully watched the screen, that was now scrolling data in the Saa'naani language, tapping a key here and there to prompts on the screen. Once the display stopped scrolling, she wrote down the resulting string of characters on a handy padd.

“Jo, not being nose-y, but is that the program called 'Cryptox'?”

“It might be.” she replied.

“Just asking. Still didn't see a thing. This rifle is real dirty.”

Jo-Linn turned back to the main console, brought up a login screen and tapped in that string of characters. The login screen confirmed High Commander Dorsett's login and gave her access to a number of very high level areas of the ships' distributed frame computer system.

“I wonder who's login that was.” she mused, knowing full well that it belonged to the ships' commander. A touch of the padd erased that data and another tap made sure that information was no longer retrievable.

Tapping furiously on the keyboard once the login completed, the highly skilled Pak'Saa'naani navigated her way around the system, in search of something that didn't belong. That looper had be loaded in resident memory someplace and after a long search, she found the malignant snippet of code.

Jo was able to stop the program and eradicate it but that looper had done considerable damage, shutting down a number of automated environmental functions. She knew the first thing was to get environmental back to nominal conditions so any damage to the ventilation systems could be visually checked. Tapping a few keys, she stepped back and took a deep breath.

“There. That's a start.” she mused.

“Jo, status?”

“Oh, I shut down the evacuation pumps, Gil. Once I had blue indicators, I opened up the valving to re-pressurize the ductwork and I gave lockout control back to the local consoles.”

“That is a good start.”

“Gil, someone was being very malicious.” she offered up once she had turned back to her screens. “Internal communications is down in that zone along with security video feed.”

“Can you fix that?”

“Give me a moment or two,” she replied, tapping in a few command line arguments. Once the screen began scrolling again, she smiled. “There, back on line. Hold it, there's a power blackout in the zone near bulkhead one-fifty. That feels kind of suspicious to me.”

“Sabotage?” Gillat asked.

“Uh, maybe or maybe not.” Jo-Linn offered up. “See this security camera?” she asked, pointing to the feed on the screen to her left, “It looks like one or two beings are in a circuit breaker closet. Here, let me zoom in,” she added, trying to make the camera focus.

“I think I know who they are.” Gil stated, watching the images of the persons that were visible through a window in the closet. “I think that is Na'Krista and her *One Love*.”

Jo tapped a few keys, then picked up her handset. “Na'Krista, this is Jo-Linn. Can you hear me?”

They watched the shorter person in that small room put their radio to their mask. “This is Krista! Jo, we're stuck in an electrical closet and we need help! The pressure in the ducting is too low for us to leave this closet.”

“No need to panic. I'm re-pressurizing the ductwork. As soon as the pressure is equal, you can get out of there.”

“Jo, see if you can reach my mother. I'm sure she knows something is wrong. I can feel it.”

“Okay, hold tight. It might take over one hundred units of time to bring the pressure back to equilibrium.”

“Understood, we're good for a while, anyway.”

“While you wait, could you turn those breakers back on?” Jo asked.

“We will do that.”

Na'Krista put her radio back on her waist belt, reached around her *One Love* to reset the circuits that she had opened, then she leaned against Jeff, hugging him tightly. This ordeal was something

she never wanted to experience again, that was for sure. If she had thought someone was trying to kill them, she would have insisted on them wearing their armor, set up for vacuum incursions. As it was, she was sure her mother would now insist on an escort for them. Most likely Hallett and maybe Marlett.

This had not been the first time that one of her family had been the target of some assassin. Her grandmother Sa'Kayla Keth had been murdered in her own home, the home that was now the property of Na'Krista. The flooring in the living area had to be replaced because the blood stains couldn't be eradicated.

The home had been given to her through her grandmother's written '*Directives After Death*'. It was also a well known fact that House Trent'lan had never been happy with her grandmother Kayla deeding the land over to House Keth'lan. The one thing about the land that had always worried Krista was some wording buried in those directives. There was a requirement that she join with a male before her thirtieth birthday. They would both have to be active with running the agricultural operations for two years after their joining or House Trent'lan could legally petition the Senate for return of the property.

“Krista, are you okay?” Jeff asked, since she was hugging him rather tightly.

“I'm . . . I'm upset.” she replied. “We almost lost our lives and now we will probably have to deal with an escort everywhere we go. And I do mean *everywhere*. I know my parents too well.”

“Will it be that bad?” he asked.

“One of the detachment will probably stay in our room with us while we sleep.”

“Oh.”

“I guess we will just have to deal with it, as you would say.”

Before she could add to that, some being knocked on the door to the closet. Jeff looked through the small port to the right of the door to observe Na'Kesta, wearing an odd-looking garment that must have been inflated by pressure differential and a clear bubble helmet, standing in the ductway with Hallett, clad in similar a similar garment and headgear.

“Krista? Can you hear me?” the voice crackled on the radio.

“Mother?!?” the young femme blurted out as she turned to see her parent in the ductway. “How did you get in here?”

“Marlett set up a utility airlock over the hatch where you started from. It allowed us to equalize the pressure and get into the ductwork to find you. We will stand guard right here until you and Jeffrey can get out of that closet, once the pressure in the ductwork is within the minimum survivable level.”

“Thank you, Mom.”

“You're welcome, my least Daughter.”

That evening, after Jeff and Krista had been checked out by the ships' medical department, they were trying to enjoy a last meal in their quarters. Indeed, Hallet Trasc'lan and Marlett Blane'lan were setting up a temporary workstation on the small bar area in their room at her mother's insistence. The troopers had both tried to be discreet but it was hard to ignore their presence.

“Your father told me that the commander is awake and doing well.” Jeff offered up as small talk while they finished their meal.

“I heard the same from my mother.” she replied. “He has instructed that we will wear full atmospheric gear to do our work.”

“Your father said that to me.”

“And, we are to have an armed escort at all times. No variance from that will be allowed.”

“That could be problematic, I guess.”

“We will have to try to deal with it.” she offered up.

Looking up to see Jeff was nodding in agreement with her, she knew this would be a rough fourteen days. Hallett and Marlett had both expressed the desire to stand guard outside their cabin but Na'Kesta would not hear of it. Even though that meant the couple would be highly protected, any privacy was gone, now. Even though they had both agreed to wait until they were joined, she did enjoy cuddling with her future *One Love*.

Now they would just have to stick it out until they arrived on Elazia.