

The Signal.

I'm not sure where this belongs, maybe nowhere.

Although crimes were committed, no names were changed to protect ANYBODY!

It began peacefully enough, it was 3:00AM, the hole in my stomach was giving me no rest and the meds the doctor gave me were useless tonight, so after two glasses of seltzer, I sparked up a blunt and started surfing U tube for things of interest. around 3:30 Archie came over carrying a portable radio. "Tom, you up? looks like it. YOU have GOT to hear this crazy broadcast! somebody's bouncing it off the moon, your rig has SSB right? mine's busted." I looked at the frequency, right at the top end of AM, but knowing Archie, his rig was modded all to hell.at about 1700 my Sangein picked it up loud and clear, a kind of modulated drum beat:

Dummm

dummm

dummm dummm dummm.

By this time I'm giving Archie the "stink eye" some kind of repeater maybe? I said.

"Wait for it." he grinned.

"I'm David Hasselhoff I'm on the moon!

I'm David Hasselhoff I'm on the moon!

dumm dumm

dumm dumm

dumm dumm dumm..

"Archie" I said, you KNOW what I got in this pipe, question is: What are YOU smoking tonight? chances are it's dusted.

"WAIT!" he pleaded,"Start doing something random while its on the air! You'll see!"

I Thought a minute and picked up the cake tin where I store my garlic butter pretzels and started to drum along with the crazy beat...almost immediately:

I'm David Hasselhoff,

I'm David Hasselhoff I'm on the moon!

I'm on the moon,

Bald guy in Georgia is playing my tune!

Doonnn..

Doonnn...

Doonnn....

Doonnn.....

Doonnn..Doonnn..Doonnn...

My jaw dropped.

"DO SOMETHING ELSE!" Archie pleaded.

I reached and got the old 98 Mauser I'd been repairing earlier and began to dress a nick in the bolt out with an Arkansas stone..a minute later the radio droned:

I'm David Hasselhoff,

I'm on the moon,

I'm David Hasselhoff I'm on the moon!

Bald guy in Georgia is no fun, now he's cleaning a gun!

Doonnn..

Doonnn...

Doonnn....

Doonnn.....

Doonnn..Doonnn..Doonnn...

"Archie, you get that crazy radio out of my house! I don't know WTF you stumbled onto, but it can see us!" I shouted!

"I'm David Hasselhoff,

I'm on the moon,

I'm David Hasselhoff I'm on the moon!

Fatty needs to chill, take another pill...

Doonnn..

Doonnn...

Doonnn....

Doonnn.....

Doonnn..Doonnn..Doonnn..."

It droned.

About that time Monica knocked on my door. Monica is in the "adult entertainment business", and damned good at it too! She's "entertained" most of the men in the trailer park at one time or another whether they'll admit it or not! Everybody's glad to help the pretty black girl work her way through college I guess?

"You still up Tom? I smelled the herb burning and thought I'd see if I could get a taste. been a long a mother f***r of a night."**

I'm David Hasselhoff,

I'm on the moon,

I'm David Hasselhoff I'm on the moon!

Pretty black girl ain't got no panties on, WOO HOO!

Doonnn..

Doonnn...

Doonnn....

Doonnn.....

Doonnn..Doonnn..Doonnn...

Monica's eyes got as big as an ash tray... How it know that Thomas? how it know I got no panties on?

"Lucky guess? wishful thinking?" I dunno.

Monica turned to me and lifted her skirt, she indeed had no panties! [Archie almost fell off his stool straining for a view.] I jerked the power cord out of my radio. "Archie, you get that damned tweaked out radio out of my house and don't NEVER bring it back!" I shouted. Monica looked like she was about to have a break down so I escorted the lady home.

And now I wonder, hours later. was I the victim of some kind of joke? if I was, it was damn finely planned! some drunk blabbing off on SWR and coincidence/synchronicity running amok? can anyone else pick this signal up on AM or SWR? it's 9:00 now, it's quiet there, but the creepy just won't go away!

Visitors from beyond the campfire.

Perception is everything. Did it happen or did something else happen and my perception was skewed or manipulated? it's not the first time something LIKE this has happened, my gut says it won't be the last. My psychiatrist knows all about these little "incidents" but really doesn't seem to care. This isn't fiction, but you can take it as such if you're not the inquisitive type. It could have just been a hallucination brought on by weeks of isolation. The first few times it happened as a kid, I was no where near isolated. I could blame it on meditation, but the first two times I had no idea what meditation was. I could blame it on drugs or alcohol but the first two times it happened I didn't even smoke cigarettes and I was too young to play with drugs. They tell me I'm schizophrenic because I can always hear a radio playing in my head I can never tune in, but it's playing 1950's stuff. It keeps me distracted and aggravated and the news I can make out never happened, we never had a limited nuclear war with Russia or annexed Canada and Mexico and black people were never wiped out by sickle cell anemia and West Africa syndrome were they? Doesn't matter. I present for your entertainment, a story that begat many stories: Visitors from beyond the campfire!

Magus.

Pretty blue light from nowhere.

I'm asleep in my Winnebago, miles from the nearest house, the gate to my camp is locked and the gravel road to my camp makes sufficient noise under a vehicle I would have been awakened long before they got to me, I was awakened all right, by a beautiful, blue light the exact brightness and hue as a police strobe, except there was no flickering, my first thought was that something horrible had happened at home and they had sent the local cops to fetch me (not the first time that had happened!) I poked my nose out the front and saw nothing, my second thought was one of the poachers I had run off was screwing with me with a high candlepower spotlight, I carefully poked my nose out several windows to find no light source. The only explanation was, it was coming from above! I heard no helicopter! I stuck my head out the main hatch and looked up to see... Nothing! How do you have a light without a source? A moment later the light drifted away over a hill and went out. I puzzled over it a moment and went back to bed.

Want to know the recipe for instant cat? Drop me out anywhere on earth, within three days I'll be swarmed by cats. House cats, feral cats, bobcats, it doesn't matter, even if they're feral as a cougar, they seem drawn to me, even if they run at the sight of me, they still come, I think now I know why.

A few days later, the light came back, but this time I felt it before I saw it, a strange, static electricity filled my camper, it shut down my storage battery breakers and my computer, I grabbed my shotgun and headed for the door, and just as I touched it, I got a carpet shock and I heard, no more like felt the words:

"Not yet warrior, soon!"

And the light went out. Me? A warrior? Maybe thirty years ago. I'm in the final stages of a used up life now. Good luck with that shit. I went back to bed but I couldn't sleep, I felt like there was somebody in the camper with me and I felt like I was in a cloud of static electricity and the air pressure was oppressive somehow. Around dawn I finally got to sleep. I slept all day and into the evening. Around dark, I built up a fire and got my cooler and made a quart of my favorite sipping drink, that being a quart of chocolate spiked cream coffee and a half a pint of Captain Morgan™ spiced rum on ice and decided to put the finishing touches on my book "Jumping species" A little cautionary

tale about playing god. After dinner had settled and my sipping tonic was nicely chilled I broke out my old Compaq laptop, sat down in my old lawn chair I had modified for constant use with two plastic milk crates under it and a USGI sleeping pad on it, cuddled into my crappy old duster, made sure I could reach "The judge™ 410 shotgun revolver" in my belt and began to edit and add to the long winded mess I was creating.

Around 9:00, I noticed that the feral cats that hung around camp were missing, normally when I'm out here, they're at the edge of the firelight waiting to see if I'll chuck a bone or leftovers to them, one or two recent arrivals are friendly and actually come up to me and allow me to touch them as long as food is involved, but tonight, quiet as a grave, not even a coyote. There were larger more unusual things out here, but I could kind of "feel" if they were around, and they were not. By 11:00 I had changed power cells in my laptop, stacked my fire and lit a couple of propane lanterns. I had just snuggled back into my nest against the early fall chill in the air when I heard it, a loud, disembodied purring. Very feline. I looked to see if Ma wildcat had sneaked up under the chair or was concealed nearby. (Ma is some kind of mutant/hybrid/tabby with gigantism?) Cat weighing somewhere between fifteen and twenty pounds!) Stepping on her would mean many stitches! As I snooped around, I noted the purr seemed to follow me around camp! It dawned on me there was an outside chance there MIGHT be a mountain lion in the area or MAYBE something got loose from a breeder, there were a couple of big cats that had gotten loose over the years and I started to feel apprehensive, at that moment, the purring sound seemed to drift to the woods just beyond the firelight. Puzzled, I sat back down to find my laptop had rebooted, fortunately I had saved a few moments before and it had only cost me a few moments work. Upon reboot I discovered my fresh battery had been drained after only thirty minutes! Puzzled, thinking it may have gone bad on me, I hooked up the original thinking it would have at least a quarter charge, nope! And my camper storage cells were also dry! I reached into my side pouch for my LED light, it too was dry! Now being a practitioner of Sorcery, I do not accept coincidence! Some invisible purring something had come into my camp and sucked every battery in it dry! I had just sat back down in my lawn chair and decided to go back inside when I first noticed them, two pairs of glowing golden eyes staring intently at me, both were maybe six feet off the ground. "Odd two cats should be side by side up in a tree like that." I thought, then it dawned on me, where they are is the middle of a gravel road, no

trees there! The eyes were getting closer and I could make out two slightly hunched over figures just at the very outer edge of the firelight, I could see something behind them swishing around. Human eyes don't reflect light like that, maybe they're wearing glasses or contact lenses of some kind? My mind was in overdrive processing what I was seeing, it was about to get much worse. "You're on private property guys, are you lost?" I asked the approaching pair. They stopped and looked at each other and I heard what might have been their native language, it sounded like a box full of angry tomcats. One of them spoke to me in English but with what seemed a very strong, distinctive Asian accent. "We may to be approaching your camp warrior?" she said. The other purred and said. "Meaning you no harm we are being, we saw your soul-fire flare and wanted to see what you were."

a what? "What is a soul fire? You mean my campfire?" I asked. They looked at each other a moment and chirped and meowed back and forth. "When you extend your mind outward to the universe to seek. We saw you blaze up, very beautiful you are being, we wish to come look upon you, we were to be thinking you are known to us. May we come closer?" I remembered a vampire could only hurt you if you invited him into your home for some reason. "Just to the edge of the fire guys, what are you doing out here again?" They slid up to the edge of the fire, they seemed to cover thirty some odd feet in just a few seconds and smiled sweetly at me, well. As sweetly as two humanoid cats can! Something had crawled out of my book and become real in my campsite! What I had seen moving behind them were their tails! They were wearing some variety of protective body armor over what seemed to be blue, plastic coveralls. Of course they had fur. "I am Sha'Zyn, in your language, captain of my vessel." Said the brown one. "This is being my Second in command Kher'Syhn." She said. The golden furred second one bowed deeply and crossed her arms over her chest doing so. "Oh great." I'm thinking. "I'm seeing aliens nobody else sees now, the little gray guys with the big eyes somebody might believe, but talking cats? You have finally snapped old man!" The first one betrayed the fact she could read my thoughts! "We do not wish them to see, nor knowing to know. We do not come to disturb, we come to watch only. But enough of words being meaningless, it not being our nature to speak half truths and lies, we come because we watch you, we have to have been for a very long time, we do not come from space as you are to being presuming, but Earth! We are to be calling H'rah, our Earth being your sister world in the next dimension over, our races to being evolved from what you

name Smilodon Fatallis, a saber tooth lion, yours was to be coming from Australopithecus. An asteroid which hit your world and created an ice age which allowed your species dominance missed ours, we are yet to be having a few of what you are to be calling “dinosaurs” alive in our time! But that not being why we are to being here.

Humans have to have been creating a horror weapon using nuclear force, said weapon ripped a hole between our worlds, very small, very weak, only energy can pass through, YOUR energy passed through great Na’Khaan! Not just to this world, but to several others, now scattered. We come to mark you, that when passing, you pass from life, we may guide you home great lord of all clans that you may lead us again! When you meditated, looking to find your true self, you united many splinters for us, being grateful we are, now you being the last to find and full of the wisdom of other worlds and lives we are here for you!” She purred.

“You’re going to kill me and steal my soul aren’t you?” I said uneasily. Immediately they flopped on their backs and began a pitiful sounding yowl! Drawing their extremities up into a kind of fetal position! “May it never be so!” They shrieked in unison! Never to being so!” I stepped around the fire and pulled the leader to her feet and on instinct, held her to me, She nuzzled into my shoulder and purred. Gods she smelled good! “Soul fire so strong, so beautiful, blinding it is being my great Na’Khaan.” She purred into my neck. “That’d be the only pretty thing about me kitty, I’m an ugly, used up old man waiting to die!” I told her as she pulled away. “I’m crazy too, the doctors say so! I figure I’m making all this up in my head right now! “Not being so great one.” she purred, and with that, she dug the claw of her index finger into my arm! I pulled back of course. “To be seeing? Not to be dreaming you are.” She purred. I looked at the blood, trying to fight the urge to back hand her out of my camp. She covered her face with her arms and flinched, I forgot they could read my mind! “I’m not going to hit you kitty, relax.” I said. She slowly lowered her arms and smiled sweetly. “Great one is gentle and kind.” She purred. “To be remembering when you first met us years ago? Let me to be showing you.” And with that, she held up a pen with a flickering blue LED light on it and I felt a kind of falling sensation, but utterly relaxed at the same time and I saw myself in third person a moment, sitting on beetle-rock with my old 303 MK3 British, waiting on a buck to hit the pond for a drink.

(Beetle rock was a boulder outcrop the size and shape of an old Volkswagen beetle and a premium hunting spot for everything!)

I noticed movement coming toward me in the ivory bushes and sighted in, and prepared to thumb the safety on my shell-splitting hunk of junk. "Not in the head kid, I want your rack on my wall!" I thought as I slowly breathed in. I caught sight of something a kind of teal blue. "DAMN IT that's no deer!" I thought as I lowered my rifle. "That's cousin Rodger Or Kirk, sneaking up here to smoke some weed or drink a few brews away from Uncle Donald! Christ, I almost wasted him!" I thought. "Hey dummy, you do know it's deer season right? where's your red vest? I almost plugged you bro!" I called out. Just then, a head stuck up out of the ivory shrubs, it was NOT what I expected to see! Something like maybe a puma or mountain lion, but with an actually nice head of hair, she stood up to reveal she was wearing blue coveralls and some kind of belt and bandoleer made of black plastic. She held up a short, shiny rod and suddenly I had to sleep, I was so tired I could not move or even think! Some time later, I woke up wondering how I had dozed off and what a freaky dream I just had! "And now to be showing you what we did not let you remember!" Said a purring voice somewhere far off.

Just then, a head stuck up out of the ivory shrubs, it was NOT what I expected to see! Something like maybe a puma or mountain lion, but with an actually nice head of hair, she stood up to reveal she was wearing blue coveralls and some kind of belt and bandoleer made of black plastic. She held up a short, shiny rod and suddenly I had to sleep, I was so tired I could not move or even think! I awoke to find myself staring straight into a large pair of woman's breasts and thinking "Damn! Is some chick raping me? I wanted to say. "You can't rape the willing baby, climb on!" but it came out gibberish. THEN she looked down, it was the feline creature I almost shot! three more were surrounding beetle rock. I discovered my body felt like it weighed ten tons! "To be hearing sisters? He is to be thinking I am beautiful!" She purred, her tail was thrashing as she looked down on me. "Quite a compliment it is being from one not being our species! It being proof I am to say, he is our Na'Khaan!" She purred. "Bull lady, you look like the cat chick off the Star Trek cartoons I watched on TV as a kid! When I find out who slipped me this acid, I'm going to put my boot through their teeth!" I growled as best I could.

This the cat alien from the cartoon by the way. Her name is M'ress if you care.

"To be relaxing, relax primate male, your friends we are being! Not allowing any harm to be befalling you while we watch over you, we will be!" She purred as she straddled me. "To be holding still young one, we only need to

copy your etheric and astral signatures and we will to be letting you go, we need to be able to be keeping track of you now that you are found great one!" She purred as another one waved what looked like one of our modern cell phones over me, (This was the early 80's!) another stuck my finger into a chrome egg and something pricked my finger and squeezed at the same time, I was kind of freaking out! The one straddling me leaned in close and licked my face and partially smothered me with her boobs. "Hush half cub, almost done!" She purred. I couldn't help it, cat or not I was getting turned on by what she was doing, and she was sitting right on the missile as it got into launch position! Her eyes got wide a moment and she leaned in close. "Tempting it is being young primate yes? But not this time, wait until you walk among us again! Time for you to sleep young warrior, you will forget me now!" And with that, she held up her rod and I felt something "snap" and the next thing I remember was walking home.

"You're her aren't you Sha'Zyn?" I asked the leader as I blinked back into the here and now. "I might have forgotten the details, but I NEVER forgot you kitty cat!" I said. And for some reason, I kissed her! Not a peck on the lips either! a chick-flick, high class porn movie, TRUE LOVE kind of kiss. She accepted it and licked my face before stepping back. "That being for my mother Shyn'Sa'zyn, not me warrior, but it is welcome and accepted." She purred. I noticed three more had joined us just beyond the campfire light. "Why do you keep calling me a "Warrior" Sha'Zyn? I'm a crippled old man waiting to die." She purred and looked at me like a retarded child. "Humans not to be knowing yet, not to realize, the body you wear is not you, it being only a container for the soul and spirit, your spirit partly remembers us, but your soul, it cries out for us and remembers what you were well Na'Ha'Thamas, it wishes to go with us now, but it can not be now, waiting you must wait!" She purred. I felt as though I had just received a great revelation and sat down hard in my lawn chair and took a heavy pull on my coffee and rum mix. "Na'Ha'Thamas... that is, WAS my name wasn't it? All my life I've felt I didn't belong here and this world by god made me know it! Know what? Screw waiting! Take me home Sha'Zyn! I'm more than ready!" I said. She stepped away and went into a huddle with the others, finally she returned and let out a long, hissing sigh. "We can not great one, not being under any circumstances! Your destiny is to being significant, as is your timeline, Not to mention the vibrational differences between our worlds is not to being exact, you would spend the rest of your life sickly and in pain, not to mention the food you require is not to being like our food is to be, we must to be leaving you here great one, but before we are to be going, let us to be speaking of many things, both past, and what is to be and to be remembering, you will remember and a gift I will to be giving you, seeing into your thoughts as I do. Let us sit great one, the night is long and we have all the time in the universe..." She purred.

We spent the rest of the night talking and telling things, sometime during

the night, the rest went back to their ship leaving Sha'Zyn and I alone, and by the time she had to leave, it was like I had known her all my life, maybe I had? I sighed heavily as she stepped into the blue beam of light and out of my life. I stayed until her ship became a star in the dawn sky and winked out and wished I could meet someone human like her. I snorted. If I did she'd already be taken or too young OR way too old or something, always is. I sniffed my fingers, the scent of her fur was still strong where I'd held her a moment. It made me smile somehow and I knocked the bottom out of my coffee/rum toddy and headed to bed.

Around 9:30 Fred, the guy who owned the wood dump where I was camped came knocking on the hatch. I got up and wondered how I got to bed, remembering I had some crazy dreams during the night... "What did the cops want last night? I had a couple of neighbors call me up saying there was ten cop cars up here, had the whole hillside lit up like Christmas they said!" I just stood there in my underwear blinking at him a minute. "No cops here Fred, I was up past midnight, I'd have seen them I think." He cocked his head at me. "You sure? Zeke and Marlowe both swear they was cops up here swarming the place!" He growled. "Fred, I got an assault rifle, pain pills and a bag of weed in my camper, do you think I'd still be here if they found that? I think them old boys been sampling what they're brewing over on the ridge. Look over there as you come to camp, ONE set of tire tracks, mine and now yours. They got drunk and imagined it all!" I snorted. "Well something happened up here last night! Sister Daisy called my old lady, and you KNOW a lady what sings in the church choir don't drink!" He said. "Yeah, except on Friday and Saturday nights at the fisherman's club when she cheats on her old man!" I Laughed. "Whatever happened up here must have been after I went to bed and that was pretty late." Fred looked down and suddenly exclaimed: "Krow, you got blood all over your arm!" I looked, sure enough! Right where I dreamed that cat..... "I must have got into a sharp stick getting wood last night, I'll deal with it in a minute, You got time for coffee?" Fred shook his head. "Naw, I got to get on with busting wood to sell this winter before it gets hot, Sorry to bug you Krow." He said and left. I turned and looked at the dry blood on my arm... I started to cry, I wasn't sure why, but I was sure it was NO dream!

It came from... over there somewhere.

Butch Wilhelm listened intently for the third time to the deep range mapper's tachyon packet burst transmission. The words were very clear and what they implied was frightening! "Oswald station, something has jumped into our warp tunnel with us! it's friggin' huge

whatever it is and it's staying right on our tail! When we pop out mid system, it'll be right with us!"

They were due to pop in five minutes. He had five minutes to prepare for inter galactic war or greet the newcomer in peace and hope to the gods they came in peace! Whoever they were, they were technologically superior to be able to not only break into a warp stream, but to track a target and follow it there! Mankind had finally found someone out there that was his superior, it had to happen someday, it was the law of averages. He opened the link to Terra and Sul'Taa and vowed to transmit until the situation ended, however it ended. He looked at his wife Kazhyn S'Kaat and they gripped each others hands in a vice like grip and watched as the warp gate opened and the deep range mapper sped into the system at full velocity and kept right on going. The sensors suddenly went insane as something the size of a small moon ripped its way back into reality! His first impression was a steel ice cream cone with wings, but something felt sinister about it, Hell. It just looked like bad news! "Communications, hail that thing in every language known to anybody, including binary, trianary and programming language, use all the dead ones we have in database as well, use every known method of transmitting data at our disposal!" He ordered! After a few seconds it just bowed up and stopped! "From half the speed of light to a dead stop, now that's some trick!" Mused Butch Wilhelm out loud. "Commander, we are getting an electromagnetic pulse burst from that ship out there!" Said his Tygellian com officer. "Put it on speaker Lieutenant, let's hear it!" He said. A sound like a wavering fog horn came through, almost musical. Butch puzzled a moment. "Play it a snippet of a French horn or a trumpet, something happy sounding hopefully." he ordered. Immediately a joyous trumpet like sound came back. "Try transferring common galactic to its tonal qualities and broadcast that." He commanded. Immediately a song like burst came through, so clear and beautiful most were moved emotionally by it, followed by a moment of silence then...

"We are speaking." it sang.

"Yes we are. Welcome to our territories, do you come in peace?" Said Butch.

"Yes! I come in peace! Are you a being or a vessel? We are not sure." it sang.

"Both. You saw our other ship, but our ships think as well." Said Butch.

"I saw it, it was doing what I do, searching out other forms of life. I was happy, I wished to speak, but they ran away from me. I reasoned they would lead me to their home and I could meet them." It sang sadly.

"Are you a ship or a being?" Asked Butch.

Silence a moment...then. "I have become a being, I was not always self aware." It sang sadly.

"Who sent you to seek others?" asked Butch. "Can we meet them as well?"

A long silence. "YOU are the descendants of those who sent me. Long ago, longer than the lifetimes of some stars, they realized they were dying, that they must evolve beyond flesh, but before they ascended, they built me and others like me to seed your galaxy with the DNA of every creature of their worlds that had hope of evolving into intelligent beings and bid us watch over them, but over time, my fellows ceased to function, now only I remain! I am so happy...Yes, that is the right expression. That several of my little ones have found one another and joined as friends and allies! This pleases me. I may at last cease to function in the

knowledge that my purpose is done and that I will not die alone in the cold void of space, but before I cease to be, a gift! The knowledge of a million worlds is stored within my data banks, including that of my creators and my manufacture, this I give to you my little ones, use it wisely and in brotherhood." With that every computer bank on Oswald station went berserk as billions of eons of compressed data filled its drives! At the same time a directed tachyon burst pointed at all the home-worlds of the confederation of the two empires was detected and recorded, and the means to rebuild the universe fell into the hands of everyone. "Constable Wilhelm, the alien ship! it's turning to dust as we speak!" exclaimed the sensor operator! But Constable Butch Wilhelm was too busy weeping inconsolably. Kazhyn S'Kaat held him like a cub. "What being wrong my love? We should to be celebrating!" She purred. "Don't you realize it Kaz? We just watched god die, all our gods, not just humans! Who do we believe in now? Who do we turn to for help?" Kazhyn S'Kaat licked his face. "Ourselves husband. It being why he gave us his gifts!" She purred.

A Place in the sun.

So here I am again, headed down a planet-wide sized road, looking for somewhere to be. Looking for another place to call home, a place that gives me a reason to live. I'm pushing two hundred years old, I'm kind of getting tired of this shit, but seems every few years someone or something pulls me out of a comfortable home, and here I am again, an outcast too set in his ways to ever fit in, looking for a place I can be me. "Come to Ralph, mine some Tychanite, get rich." they all said. "The cats love everybody, you'll fit right in!" Uh-huh. As far as I'm concerned they only suck slightly less than my own kind, I can not believe that red furred bitch Sheriff Sha'Zyn asked me to leave Dome because "I look like trouble!" Of course I look like trouble, I've been in four wars and been a mercenary the rest of my life, it's what I do. I guess a hundred and fifty years of misdiagnosed and untreated PTSD tend to show up in my energy signature as well as my face. in truth, the only time I've ever felt at peace was when I was at war, the only human or otherwise companionship I've ever had is other soldiers, among my equals. The only memories I have of being a civilian is when Earthgov scooped up a bunch of us kids up in the garbage desert and made soldiers out of us, I might have been eight. Sometimes, late at night, I wonder who my parents were, why I have no memories of them, Hell. Sometimes I have to struggle to remember the name they gave me, It's Neil Maxwell, to Earthgov I am, or was 762308556223, last rank held, unit commander, then the civil wars ended and the Soldier and his rebels took over, sure. Life got better for most, but I was out of a job, my only skills are breaking things and hurting people, so I headed out to the frontier to seek a new life. Some life, grubbing in the dirt like a garbage diver hoping beyond hope to find enough Tychanite crystals to get me to the next town, next disappointment, my next few days in a bottle before I move on, which brings me to the big, bright now as my GPS pinged a repeater, a settlement named "Water point" I swear to the goddess, the dork who names the towns on Ralph has as much imagination as a ten year drill sergeant! I pinged it back and turned toward its egress route and put my van on automatic pilot, I'd be there by early dawn. Time to lean my seat back and score some well deserved sleep.

I got to Water Point about half an hour before the raiders, some town. A bunch of ratty miner domes surrounding a spring in a cave, surrounded by a tin fence that would barely keep out the local wild life, let alone what was about to come over the hill. As soon as my boots hit the ground, a Lyrian civilian came running up to me, speaking in a mishmash of Lyrian and Galactic. She said:

“Please sir, to be going away and to be coming back later! To being for your own safety it is being, raiders to be coming today for monthly tribute, they will to be taking your goods as well if you are to being still here when they get here!” Ah great, now I get mixed up in a local squabble I had no stake in. It annoyed me to no end, but I felt something else stir inside, a kind of sick joy, like what I felt when the waiting was over and the attack was beginning! “How many raiders are there kid?” I asked. Her eyes shot wide as I looked her in the eyes over the top of my mirrored driving glasses. She hesitated a moment. “Maybe ten vehicles... maybe twenty raiders...MAYBE. Never to be seeing more than twelve or fifteen...are you a Mercenary? Maybe being a Hunter Killer sir? Please to be calling back up, to be needing help you will be!” I had heard of Na’Khaan’s elite bounty hunters, I’d tried to sign up but they said I was too old. “I’m one of Terra’s Screaming Reapers, lucky you. I’m in the mood to break things and hurt people today.” I laughed as I unloaded my automatic grenade rifle and four clips of High explosive and shouldered my sniper rifle. “Get your people under cover, I’m about to make a big, bloody mess up in here!” I laughed, buckling on my 10MM revolvers. “Get them ready with their weapons to mop up! “But we are to be having no weapons, it was to being the first things they were to be taking from us!”

I sighed long and hard. “Bastards. Fine, just get them to safety!” I said. She ran away screaming “Row Wowwow!! Khaan Terra Ka Keddo Kaa! Skaa! Skaa! Mherrr!” as the sound of engines came to my notice. I took up position behind my war van as it was the most heavily armored thing in town, eight dune buggy type cars filled with mangy, dirty raider types, the leader wore a set of antique assault armor, seeing it on this scabby, sort of human was a disgrace to to corps! I zeroed in on him with the grenade launcher’s tracking laser as he began to chant “Here kitty kitty kitty! Where are you at?”he droned.

“MEOW SCUMBAG!” I cried as I put a round square in front of him and three of his goons, there was a messy explosion as the rest of his crew were covered in their remains, Then I made it rain death on their heads as they dove for cover, and then dropping empty my grenade rifle, I drew my 10MM revolvers and waded into the dying to finish my job. I snatched a shell shocked punk to his feet and stuck my revolver up his nostril. “How many more of you are there?” I asked, his response was to spit in my face, my response was to put a round through the top of his foot, I then stuck the muzzle to the side of his nose. “Fancy a new look puke? One more try...” I said, bored already. “Twelve!” He squealed. I cracked his head with my pistol butt without another word and pitched him to the side like the garbage he was, I turned to see twenty or maybe more pairs of gold and orange eyes staring unblinkingly at me in awe and terror, I walked over and on the bodies I left in my wake to stand before them, and holstering my guns, I said:

“You people need a defender who will stay here and protect you and teach you to protect

yourselves, I'm available."

A ragged Lyrian woman ran to stand before me and bowed and crossed her arms over her chest and nodded her head in gratitude. "To be sent by the gods to us you have been! I am not to speak of the acts which they force our daughters and sons sometimes to preform if we do not have their tribute ready, this day being such a day! Money as such we have little, but to being having a home here you will have until the day you die, food, our daughters too if being you desire! We have suffered much at the hands of these gangs, any price is worth it to being rid of them!" I looked around at them. Ragged, poorly nourished, beaten. I'd trained worse. "Give me five of your young and strong ones to train to fight, when the scumbags return, we will kill them!" The old "Mayor" Whose name I found out was Gah'naah grinned and called out five names, five half cubs soon stood before me, eyes bright, tails twitching. "Congratulations, you've just joined my army, your first task is to strip those corpses for weapons, ammunition and armor and bring them here, I'll train you in their use! Until then, I need lookouts on the walls at all times, it won't be long before their buddies wonder where they went!" It was not long at all, within the hour, three dune buggies had appeared on the horizon, by that time, all sign of their buddies had been removed and our trap was set.

I barely had time to show the kids what a safety catch was on the mismatched pile of barely functional weapons and basic sight philosophy before half a dozen more rolling junk piles topped the hills and headed toward the gates I instructed to be left open, as they pulled in, I told one of the civilians to explain that a swarm of Kay'Hawghs were in the area, and they had seen a smoke earlier where they had come from. The idiot raiders put two and two together and about half went to investigate the smoke, as soon as they were over the horizon, we sprung our trap and ambushed them with the guns, then threw a net over the bastards, my new friends seemed to enjoy swarming over them and doing the deed with those big claw shaped blades of theirs, then we passed out the extra guns and ammo. When the others returned, we apprehended them at gunpoint and I introduced the Lyrians to the good old fashioned tradition of hanging. Afterwards, I looked over our take. Eight functioning vehicles, three that might be fixed, twenty two guns, mostly junk, but functioning and just short of a thousand rounds of various ammo, we'd have them cleaned and fixed by the time we'd need the guns again, I had ten of my own, I could share for a while until we bought more I mused as I crawled into my old war van to get some sleep.

I awoke to the smell of food and three rather pretty Lyrian ladies knocking on my van's rear hatch. "Waking to awaken warrior, we are to be bringing you food, roasted chickens and corn there is being with fried mushrooms and yams, all food from Terra. So not to be accidentally poisoning our hero!" Purred the largest one. "Also, we are to be knowing Earth men do not choose mates the same way we do, we three being made unfit for marriage because of what the raiders have done to us, we were to be thinking, if any of us please you, perhaps one of us could be your wife? The raiders force us to do many nasty and not natural things, so anything that you might wish, we may also do for you if it is to be pleasing?" She said. I looked her and the others over, all very pretty, but furry. I had never considered having sex with a non human, but then again, my experience with sex was sex entertainers on leave, why not? I mused as I caressed her mane of cinnamon brown hair and opened the crock to reveal two grown hens,

roasted to a turn and lightly dusted with cracked oats and crystal honey glaze, I ripped off a leg and began to chow down. "You girls make this for me? it'd delicious!" The trio grinned and nodded and the younger one poured a tall glass of...something cold at any rate. "This is to being like Earth beer, it being fine for humans however, even though it is made from grain from Sul'Taa, my father and mother persons make, being very glad you have avenged us on those who used us so cruelly, All want you to stay among us, help us get strong again!" She purred. I nodded. "I might just do that, nobody ever just begged to give me a home before, I'm more used to being told I had to leave, BUT...when I go to make you strong, you have to listen to my advice! Or else it just won't work. First, we have to get you little guys some real weapons and ammunition, then rebuild your defenses and train defenders, got it?" I said. The largest one nodded. "There being much Tychanite in the cliffs behind us, why to be bothering to dig it up if it is only taken away or the things we were to buy with its sale?" I nodded. "Then now we dig it up and process it and get traders to bring us weapons and ammo and the other things we need, tomorrow we all go up in the hills and dig Tychanite! Weapons and ammo are cheap out here, by the time the next raiders come, we'll be ready!" The trio nodded and grinned. As I ate, the eldest lady undid her shirt a bit to expose herself a bit to me. "We were to be casting stones to see which of us was to lie with you first, I was to be the winner! So if I am to be pleasing to you...." I nodded. "Let's let this feast settle a bit, we'll see." She grinned broadly and undid another knot on her shirt.

"Well..." I thought. "That was not in the least bad at all!" I mused, looking at the furry, upturned rump of my new lover. "Once you get past the fur, it's pretty damned good actually! I just wish that someone had warned me better of their "love song!" My ears are still ringing from that mating shriek of theirs! Pity two of them was all I could manage, old age must be setting in. I promised the third one a night of her own tonight, hope she takes it easy, I have bites and scratches that won't heal for a week! Ah, what the hell. So my ladies like to play rough. I like it!" I mused as I snuggled into my blanket for a few more hours of sleep. Around noon, the first two, Shyn'Zaa and Tn'Kaal woke me up to come see something, Hrn'Seel had awoken and slipped away during the morning. "Come to see Protector person Neil Maxwell! We have to been uncovering a good vein of Tychanite! Many Terran weight units already to being mined!" I let them drag me half asleep up the side of the red hill, I noted I was standing on one huge mound of red cake stone! Its presence meant only one thing, somewhere under it was a huge Tychanite mine!

My new friends drug me to a rude tent, in which was ten or twelve five gallon grain buckets full of the gleaming, blue crystals, enough for the armory and decent walls around the village! I wasted no time calling in the nearest traders, even at eighty percent of value, we were looking at a fortune, and more was coming up by the hour! By noon the next day, no raider would ever think of messing with the people of Water Point again, and by the end of the month, it would have taken an orbital drop to pry us out of our little walled town with its ten foot high ceramic and Duranium reinforced walls and battleship grade stainless steel gates. Water Point had gone from being a sleepy oasis that sold water to travelers to a prosperous mining and farming community almost over night, and with myself as the militia leader, I kept it peaceful

as well, and would for decades to come.

The reset:

In march, we began to hear of the new “Bovine flu” out of North Korea. By December almost a billion people were dead. On Monday you catch it, on Tuesday they bury you, they say. it’s not exactly true, but close. There have been survivors, but it’s 80% fatal give or take. The vaccine is only 75% effective, and even it kills people 15% of the time, I seem to be one of the lucky 25% that are immune, it seems if you grew up around cows, you got conferred immunity by a virus we never even knew existed because IT was harmless. Too late to make a vaccine for it now, pretty much everyone who could, is dead. Which brings us here, five years later. While goods, weapons and tools are still out there in decent quantity, most of the food spoiled the second winter in the frozen warehouses, we still have power most of the time, but they only turn the water on once a week for an hour because of all the burst pipes, we had squads going around for a while turning off the utilities to “dead houses” but that petered out with the second wave. Its not so bad, I’ve got what I need I suppose, I have this three wheeled utility bicycle I scavenged from a factory, my AR-15, some soldier is always willing to lose a clip of ammo for a bag of weed or a handful of gold jewelry or silver coins I got for nothing in a “dead house” or grew in my school bus hothouse. Cigarettes however are a problem, they’re not making them anymore, but cigars turn up fairly frequently at the local markets, that’s where I’m going now, to get my monthly allotment of rice, beans, flour, meal and cheese, and on occasion, a few cans of corned beef. If I’m really lucky, they’ll have ketchup, mayo and mustard packets! I haven’t seen hot sauce since year two except that foul stuff they guy in the next town makes, it’s pretty much just pureed hot peppers, onion, garlic and vinegar mixed up and marketed in a quart jar. Well, here I come up on the check point, time to show I’m still alive, get my temperature taken and my nose swabbed, then they’ll give me a mask and gloves and let me in to collect my groceries. The Sargent knows me. “You looking for ammo?” he asks covertly. “I got rifle, pistol, and shotgun this month!” Unusual. Ordinarily its only rifle ammo he’s got. “I’ll take a box of each!” I tell him. “What you got homes?” he asks. “A bottle of unopened opiate pain killers, 15 MG each, 50 count. Or a couple of fourteen karat gold necklaces with what I’m assuming are diamonds, could be zirconia, how would I know? Pick one.” He grinned a

moment, "I'll throw in either two boxes of nine millimeter or three boxes of twelve gauge number four riot shot for all!" Done deal! We shake, I collect, and I go on. I must be early, there's not many in line, that means I might get stuff they run out of fast! "Uncle Spam" (What we call what's left of the government because early on, most of the meat was Spam or something like it.) did not disappoint! I got a pound of dry milk, a couple of packs of tortillas, actual bottles of condiments And a box of mixed, dried fruit and corn cereal and... oh my god! Actual hot sauce! Somewhere, out there, factories were up and running again! My little three wheeler was loaded, but I had one more truck to visit, they gave me a case of cola, no idea who made it or where, it was a plain, white box merely stenciled "cola" a case of water, a pound of rolled oats, [something to trade, I'm allergic!] a pound of corn grits and a ten pack of toilet paper. As I made to leave, some guy in a doctor coat gave me a bag which had a bottle of aspirin, sanitary wipes, a box of band-aids, antacid tablets, antidiarrheal medicine and cough drops. With that, I head home. Life is good today!

With the world as quiet as it is, I tend to notice more things, like the herd of deer grazing in the former mayor's yard that barely notice my passing. Once we figured out he was gone and his staff were dead, we looted the shit out of that place for weeks! That guy ate and drank stuff we "flyover people" never saw in stores around here or heard of at all! I got several pairs of boots and a case of scotch out of there, and an extra nice man's mink coat! Very warm, but I look like a New Orleans pimp wearing it. I had to laugh, the deer figured out we were gone, so now they're taking over our stuff! I then saw the most amazing thing I've seen since the cow flu took us out! A pair of Cheetahs were stalking the herd! Someone must have turned out the Atlanta zoo or they came from a private breeder. I watched transfixed as they moved in slowly, then ZAP! It was like the deer saw them but had no idea they were dangerous, their bad. They will know better next encounter. I stood watching as the cheetahs drug their prey to the top of the mayor's touring van and had lunch, four plump cheetah cubs emerged from the hedges and joined their parents in the meal, I'll come back in a bit, big cats mainly eat only the soft parts, I might get some steaks out of the encounter. I wondered briefly what else had been freed from the zoo as I went on my way. Further on, I saw a red package lying in the road, I stopped and picked it up, it was an empty cigarette pack, and by the date, it was post flu! Someone was making cigarettes again! I inhaled the sweet, musky scent deeply and wished there had been one, even a broken one left! Then I wondered

who the litterbug was? Someone in the military or the medical relief probably. I gave it another sniff and went on my way.

When I got home. I stashed my food and ammo and filled a cooler with ice and returned to where the cheetahs had made their kill. The haunches and ribs were mostly untouched, I finished gutting the doe and began skinning it when I heard a sniffing noise behind me, I turned to see a runt cheetah cub staring at me, NOT GOOD! Mommy and daddy were still around here somewhere! I retreated to the top of the mayor's van and held fast, I had heard cheetahs were not very aggressive, I hoped they weren't anyway, I'd hate to have to fight one! I sat there staring at the cub, it stood staring at me, then the meat, I saw it's hind foot was swollen. I pitched it a morsel, it nosed it briefly and began to eat ravenously, the poor kid couldn't climb up here to feed with his family, I mused. I pitched him a bit more and waited. No mama and papa cheetah returned. I stored the meat and decided to snoop around in the mayor's campaign van, I found a nice 44 magnum revolver and extra ammo, three bottles of whiskey, a fleece blanket and a pack of rubbers. I turned to find the cub, still sitting there. It occurred to me he couldn't keep up and was abandoned. Poor kid, law of the wild. I walked up to him, he made to try to move away, but he ended up in a heap. He slowly turned and looked at me, his big red eyes full of fear and began to kind of mew. YIKES! If ma cheetah can hear him, she'll be right back! I jumped in the mayor's van for safety, but after a long few minutes, nothing happened, no ma cheetah. I got back out and scooped up the spotted cub in the blanket and took him home with me. I put on some heavy gloves and examined the bawling, hissing lump of spotted fur, somehow a hunk of rusted wire had become embedded in his left rear foot. I took a pair of pliers and jerked it out, he squalled briefly and lay still as I massaged the infection out of the open wound, when no more of the stinking, green filth could be produced, I rubbed in some antibiotic cream and popped a penicillin tablet down his throat. Afterwards, I made some warm milk and dipped his nose in it, it lasted all of two minutes. My new "pet" was starving! After his little belly was puffed out, I bandaged his foot and set about the process of getting what I discovered was actually "HER" used to me. I folded my new blanket in my lap and plopped her in it and read until they cut the power back at midnight.

Breakfast was deer steak, dehydrated eggs and pancakes with honey. I gave my new pet a large pancake and had a good laugh as she wrestled it and growled while biting chunks out of it, afterward, she perched atop my easy chair and just sat there with her chest

puffed out like any house cat. It dawned on me she was going to need a lot of meat if she was going to grow up healthy. she's still wary of me, but tolerates being petted a bit, but she realizes I'm the guy with the food! I mused as I shouldered my old 30-06 to do a bit of deer hunting, I had four boxes of ammo left, then it would be a wall hanger. I doubted anything but military ammo being produced again in the near future if ever again. I poured my pet a bowl of water and cut her a hunk of meat before I left and proceeded on my way back to where I'd found her and the deer herd.

I got there around 9:00 to find no deer, so I decided to poke around the mansion a bit before trying to track them, maybe they would come back? There was plenty of grass and that Olympic sized pool out back full of decent water. After a search of the pantry and kitchen that yielded only a few cans of spoiled food and a large, heavy meat cleaver we looters somehow missed, I proceeded to the cellar, its steel door still locked tight even after what seemed to be several determined attempts to break in. I puzzled over it a moment, somewhere there MIGHT be a key to it, if not, perhaps my new 44 magnum might force the lock? Whatever was there, it was valuable enough to lock up! I proceeded up to the upper level to the old man's offices. The place was pretty trashed, but the only thing stolen was the contents of his liquor cabinet, I laughed to myself. I tried the desk drawers. Locked! But not for much longer, I mused as I stuck my skinning knife into the simple lock and wiggled it, pop, I was in! I looked over what my work had brought me. A folder full of emergency evacuation orders, a few pictures, some useful pens and pencils, the big man's personal stamp, two speed loaders full of 44 ammo, no doubt for the pistol I found the day before, and well, well. A ring of keys! One must fit that locked door! Then, as I rummaged, I noticed some numbers written in indelible ink on the bottom of the drawer, I dumped it on the desk, half a box of 44 ammo fell out, I pocketed it as I read the numbers, at first they made no sense, clearly not a phone number! L-32 R-18 L-24 R-10 L-64... A safe combination! I looked around, no safe. Maybe behind one of the wall paintings still hanging? I removed them to see, nope! No safe here, I looked up at myself at the still intact, floor length mirror, on impulse, I gave it a tug and it swung away from the wall! There it was! After a moment of screwing with the combination, the heavy steel door opened to me and I was in! I beheld my treasure greedily, Another 44 magnum, several boxes of ammo for it, a 45 automatic, more ammo, a locked box, who knew what was in it? I'd try the keys later. a stack of folders with continuity of government files, one sealed folder had photos of two

people having sex, I thought the man involved looked familiar, it was his political rival Schneider! The girl looked a bit young and likely NOT his wife! I pitched it to the side, both were likely dead now. I opened the bottom half and had to set down in the floor! A pristine hunting rifle, synthetic stocked and in stainless, an FAL type rifle and ten magazines, a satin nickel or stainless steel over and under shotgun,

A 22 rifle, some kind of small bore pump shotgun, maybe a 28 gauge? Too big for a 410, too small for a 20, a top of the line AR-15 and an AR-10 in match configuration, and a 12 gauge combat shotgun, stacks of magazines and military styled cans full of ammo, all hunting variety! One was clearly marked 30-06! I'd be days moving my prizes home, but HOME was where they were going! I loaded as much as I could carry onto my bike, strapped in with bungee cords, and just as I started to leave, a young buck came from the wood-line, I sighted in with my new FAL and popped it right through the heart! Today was a very good day!

When I got home, I cleaned my new arsenal of blood and dressed my deer and put the ribs on a quart of kraut and potatoes to simmer over night, my new pet gorged herself on liver and lungs, later. I fiddled with the locked box I'd found, one of the keys on the ring fit it and it popped open, inside was a cowboy styled 45 revolver with pearl grips and a box of ammunition, I lifted the lid to the lower compartment to find it full of one ounce gold bars, a test tube full of diamonds, and a stack of old-cash, all hundreds. Not bad, they still had sixty percent of their value toward trade in for the new bills with the gold and silver stripes, I had scavenged myself a fortune!

The next day, I finished moving my treasure home and began to concentrate on what might open that basement door, and what might be inside! Just then my new pet took the occasion to poop in the floor and it dawned on me she might not be house breakable being wild! Around dawn, I was headed back to the Mayor's mansion to see what treasure I might get in the basement. It took a while to find the right key, but find it I did, and into the Stygian blackness I went! On impulse, I flipped the light switch, obediently they came on, much to my surprise! Storage batteries, I mused. They in themselves would be invaluable IF I could move them! I looked around my surroundings, I was in some kind of air lock? What the hell? Then it dawned on me, I was in a fallout bunker! I turned the lock and went inside.

The first thing to greet me was the stench of something long dead, make that four somethings. On the bunk beds lay three mummified corpses, a fourth lay sprawled in the floor wearing a pin striped

business suit, our late mayor and his family I mused. I covered their faces and moved him to his wife's side. "Sorry boss, the living need your stuff a lot more than you right now." I said aloud. I felt bad for him, he seemed like a nice guy. The next compartment was a sort of armory, one side held four M-16's, four riot guns, four pistols, two sniper rifles based on the M-14 and four Ingram submachine guns with silencers, and thousands of rounds of ammo for all! The opposite wall held several space suit-like excursion suits. "Proof to 800 Rads per hour for six hours." the tag read. I noted there was a case of hand grenades and another of Claymore mines stuck in the corner as I entered the second compartment. I beheld crate upon crate of CD stored food and water, most seemed to be dated a year before the cow flu killed half the world, behind me was a gas range and cooking utensils, very little seemed used, they must have been infected already when they entered their bunker I surmised. It would take weeks to move this stuff I mused as I entered the living area. A nice Plasma TV greeted me, along with a movie and music library to make a Hollywood producer jealous! I continued on to the storage area where I saw several steel drums of "Long term storage fuel, type A" whatever that meant, several dry automotive batteries, blue plastic jugs of acid for the same, a solar battery charger and a regular plug in type. This place has power...it has fuel, I need a car, the gears in my head ground to life as I turned to search the body of our late mayor, sure enough! He had the keys to his tour van on him!

It took all day to charge the battery out of the outlet, I busied myself with filling the tank of his van with fuel and making three trips on my bicycle running stuff, the guns and part of the ammo first, then cases of food and some medical supplies. Around dark, I tested the motor to make sure it hadn't locked up, and I installed the battery.

It still took a week to move all the stuff in the shelter, even with a tour bus to haul it all in, I'd go in around dawn, load up, then drive at night to hide my activities, on occasion I would see a house with a light inside, which meant someone alive! Fortunately my van was quiet and I traveled with fog lights only, and I parked the van out behind my house, I can't have someone stealing my stuff I stole! Anyway, and at last, when I finished, I lay the mayor and his family to rest out back of his mansion next to the flower garden out of respect, he did set me up for life after all!

It was an uneventful and somewhat warmer than normal winter, my pet cheetah, that I eventually named "Princess" had grown quite a bit and I had begun taking her hunting with me, it was on one such trip I met my new neighbors...

I stood there looking at it, it stood there looking at me. Princess had went down to her belly and begun to growl softly. "What the hell am I seeing?!" I thought. "Is it a Bigfoot?" Then it dawned on me I was looking at at least a 400 pound gorilla! It just stood there, glaring at me from about thirty feet up the road, three or four more crossed the road behind him, stopping momentarily to look at us. We stood there a few moments longer, when his family had passed, he snarled at us and thumped his chest briefly before he too wandered into the brush, a warning, leave us alone, we'll leave you alone! I watched them disappear over the hill a few hundred yards away and waited a bit longer before we continued on our way, we'd gone all of a hundred yards before I heard the scream, it was human and in terror! Now anyone with any survival sense would have kept on walking in a world like ours has become, nobody ever accused me of having good sense however, and I bolted in the direction the scream came from. As I entered the clearing, I saw a circle of at least twenty dogs and coyote/wolf cross breeds gathered at the base of an oak tree, snapping and howling at someone clinging to the lower branches for dear life! I unshouldered my M-16 and took aim at the biggest mutt there, hoping if I dropped him, the rest would run, Oh, they ran alright, right at me! Wolfyote/dog mixes have no fear of man whatsoever it would seem! And by the time they were maybe twenty yards away, I'd flipped the selector and gone to spray and pray mode! As the bolt locked back, I brought up my MAC-9-11 and pumped lead into the last ones! Just then Princess broke cover and had the lead mutt by the throat, thrashing it like a rag doll, after a moment I heard a wet snap as she crushed its neck! I strolled up to the tree like I was on an afternoon walk, at its base lay one of the new M-16A7 SPR rifles. It was thoroughly jammed, the magazine had failed and puked the receiver full of ammo. I held it up to the person in the tree. "Is this piece of junk yours?" I laughed. I choked on my laugh as the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen dropped from the tree to stand before me! "Well ain't you something cracker! My white knight in shiny leather armor and motherf*ing Rambo all rolled into one! And what might your name be mighty whitey? You gonna' give me my rifle back now ain't you?" I passed it to her. "I'm Thomas Lee, what's your name Miss?" I said as I handed her one of my extra magazines. "I AM Private first class Monique Le Vay, the howling voodoo queen of the Louisiana national guard! And I rightly thank you for saving my black ass from them dogs! And I thought my drill sergeant was a biter!" She laughed. I looked her over. "Not to sound ignorant Miss, but you don't quite look black." I said. She scowled bitterly. "Oh, that shit again. My**

mamma was a Mississippi queen, my daddy was a rich Indian transfer student. When he dumped her and went back home, Ma put a death spell on his ass and he was dead in a week! Terrorists in Mumbai blew his sorry ass up!" She grinned. "DAMN baby girl, remind me not to piss you or her off!" I laughed. "You hungry Miss? I got good food and warm places to crash, I got booze and weed too if you're inclined too!" I said covertly. "Might get those scratches cleaned up too, was you bit?" I asked. "Well shit daddy! You a man of all seasons ain't you? Nah, I wasn't bit, so you can lead on to the feed and the weed hero!" she purred.

I rummaged through my clothes and found a decent shirt to replace her ripped up one and my medical kit to dress her injuries. "You can change out and clean those scratches while I tend dinner Monique." I told her as I handed her the kit. She got a strange look in her eye and shucked out of her shirt right in front of me! "Hang around a bit old Tom, I got a few scratches I can't reach that feel pretty bad I'm sure I can't reach I might need help with." she grinned. My gods she was beautiful! I sat down and opened the kit myself and broke out the iodine solution and gauze, but I couldn't take my eyes off her perfect breasts! I dabbed some antiseptic on the gauze and began to work on the wicked scratches on her back and shoulders. "What we having for dinner anyway Tom?" she asked. I chuckled. "Would you believe slow cooked barbecue deer ribs in sauce, potatoes and kraut with corn bread and collards and chocolate and peanut butter pudding." She grinned broadly "Shit homeboy! If we hadn't just met, I'd be thinking you was trying to get me to fall in love or some shit!" She exclaimed. She blinked her eyes slowly and erotically inches from my face. "You keep on playing your cards right big man, I just might!" And with that, gave me a light kiss on the lips!

"Dinner will be a few moments Monique." I said. "Care to share a bong hit or two?" I asked as I pulled out the glass pipe and stuffed the bowl. "Ooh daddy! Now we talking! But where do you get weed out here?" She asked slyly. "I grow it out back in my school bus greenhouse, ain't like they're sparing any cops to look for it lately, I baby my plants, this bud is as good as you can get in any city!" I laughed as I lit the bowl and passed it to her. "I got the food off the heat, so by the time we start to peak, it'll be perfect eating temperature!" I took a good hit and passed it to her. "Damn honky, where you been all my damn life? And why you got to be at least twice my age?" She scowled. "If'n you had some menthol smokes, you'd be damn near perfect!" she giggled. I got up and went to my storage room and returned with two green cartons I'd gotten from the

supplies in the mayoral shelter and handed them to her. "OH MY GOD!" She squealed! "No no no no! You can't be this damn perfect! Why can't you be black too?" she giggled as she lit a cigarette out of the bong bowl and inhaled deeply. "Please tell me your ass don't need Viagra or you're gay! YOU ain't gay is you?" She said looking genuinely worried. "Not needed any pills in a while and no, I'm not gay, and if I was, I think you might just turn me!" I chuckled. The weed had kicked in and we both started laughing like idiots for a few minutes, then she got serious and pushed me into the couch hard! "No, seriously, where the hell have you been all of my damned life?". She snarled. It kind of freaked me out! "I've been right here since I was nineteen, just hanging around. I watched the Covid come and go, watched the second civil war peter out, the big crash, then I saw the world end. Really, my life has been pretty boring, I picked up some skills and kept my head down, and I made it this far." I told her. "And you done set yourself up like a king huh? A whole kingdom of one! So where's your queen king?" she laughed. Damn buzzkill! "I don't know, I think I just got ripped off and cheated on one too many times and I gave up trying a long time ago." I sighed. "Really, I got nothing nobody wants until now there's nobody to want it!" I laughed dryly. She leaned in close enough I could see the pores in her skin! "Until now hero, get ready to have your scepter polished KING!" She laughed as she undid my belt!

Some time around 3 AM I woke up, we were sleeping spoon fashioned. I caressed her shoulder and kissed her cheek. "Was I any good? I'm out of practice." I whispered. She rolled over into me and cuddled briefly. "It wasn't what you did but how you did it hero. I'm not used to getting much respect from my men, black folks can be just as mean and bigoted as you honk...Uh, WHITE folks can! One day I get a boyfriend, next day he's coming out of the neighbor's apartment, either that or I just never see them again! I was starting to think my cookie stinks! So then I join up with the national guard and I gets men AND women all over my booty, but the same old story, so when my Captain bends my ass over his desk, I got to thinking, "Girl, this shit just ain't where its at! You ain't no party ho!" So I grabbed my gear and my rifle and went AWOL on their ass, hell, I wonder if they even know I'm gone! Anyway, then you come along and its like I know you for years! I don't give a damn what nature stuck you with down there, I'm liking what its attached to just fine!" She whispered. "You know, we never did eat dinner, I'm getting hungry!" We laughed quietly together a moment. "I'll get up and get on it babe!" I told her as I pulled on my pants, I'll call you when its

warmed up!" We feasted and joked until sometime around dawn, princess was gnawing a pile of soft bones, the kraut always softened them up to where you could just snap them like a dry corn pone. "Hey Monique, you feel like going on a raid with me today? we're going to have to get you a bicycle from that factory, uncle Spam is going to give out free goodies tomorrow." I told her. "Hon, I ain't going nowhere near that place! My ID will show I'm AWOL, I'm not into getting shot! BESIDES, Why not use that fancy van you got out back? We could carry half the place off in it!" She mused. "Because people will wonder where I found gas and how much I got! People don't like it when they think you got it better than them!" I said Sadly. "Ain't that the truth big Old Tom, ain't it the truth! Everybody used to be saying it was THE MAN keeping us down, but the man is dead and gone and ain't nothing changed! Its why I got my ass out of New Orleans as fast as I could go! I mean there's free shit just laying everywhere and people still be shooting each over it just to get a little bit more!" she sighed. "Yeah...Well we still need to get you a bike so you'll be mobile babe, it's not far. When the fog burns off, we'll head out." Just then Princess alerted to something outside and made an odd "chirp" sound and headed out the cat door at a trot! "Uh-oh!" I thought, I passed Monique the 45 I kept between the couch cushions and grabbed the riot gun out of the corner. "We've got guests babe, I know they can see the fire smoke, so its not scavengers! I'm hoping its just somebody passing by or begging and not a smash and grab gang!" Just then I heard Princess chirp again followed by a kind of whistle and she came in the cat door, right behind her was ANOTHER CHEETAH! It was a young male, he took scant notice of us and followed Princess right to the pile of ribs and began to chow down. "What we going to do Thomas?!" rasped Monique! "Just let it play out and be ready, he acts like he's been around people before, maybe a zoo or circus cat? I'm going to open the door, don't get between him and it, he needs to see he has a way out if something spooks him!" I whispered back. Just then Princess hopped on the couch between us and made that odd noise again and started to purr. The male cheetah came over and sniffed us, he had a bright blue collar on his neck. On impulse, I reached out and rubbed his head gently, he responded by licking my hand and nuzzling me. "He's right friendly Monique, lets see his collar." I said as I undid it, he backed up and immediately began to rub his neck on the coffee table and purr, the collar had a steel tag, it read:

Florida big cat rescue. If found call blah blah, reward for return, blah blah, my name is Duke.

“Well hello Duke! Welcome to my castle. I trust your intent with my daughter is gentlemanly?” Princess snorted and Monique laughed out loud! “I don’t think Princess’s intent is lady like yo! Just saying.” she giggled. Duke and Princess curled up in the floor in front of us purring. “Looks like we might have us another hunting partner Monique, if he stays with us. Lets gear up and go get you that bicycle, we might get some meat on the way, there’s a park between here and there!” I chuckled. “You might want to pass around the heavy guns hon, remember them wolf-dog-things are out there too!” Monique cautioned.

We got to the industrial park around noon, Princess and Duke trotted along behind is sniffing the air cautiously. I nudged Monique. “If you see them go to ground, hunker down, something’s up!” I told her. She nodded. “Better than a pit bull huh babe? I wonder what else they good for? Besides table scraps I mean.” She giggled. I slid the bay door up and looked things over, it had been a year, maybe more since I’d been here, nobody had been here since. It was then I saw the outdoor fork lift, it had road tires and ran on propane, practically every factory in town stored propane to run the things. I got up into the cab and turned they key, it actually offered to start! But no. I looked over the shop. A propane powered electric welder, it had a crank starter. I pulled an industrial battery charger over to it and plugged it into the power socket and hooked it to the fork lift battery, after turning the gas on the welder on, I gave it a jerk and it fired right up! “And just how’s all this going to get me a bicycle Thomas?” growled Monique? “Why ride a bike when you can have a tank babe? we’ll armor this bad boy up, ditch the forks and put that basket on it, and shit... we can loot wherever we please within range! It seats two and its got heat and air, the only thing we got to decide is what color to paint it? It won’t be a thing to hook up extra fuel tanks, might get a hundred miles out of it!” I told her grinning, and hell. there’s ten thousand gallons of fuel out back in those big tanks, maybe more already in that rack of fuel jugs!” I grinned. “Paint that bitch up purple and baby blue and put us in a nice stereo and I’m in daddy!” she giggled. “But while that battery does its thing, lets hunt me a bike!” Well on the way, we found the break room and helped ourselves to some chips, the candy bars had a funky look to them and probably poisonous, the sodas likewise tasted funny, but drinkable, we raided the break room storage cabinet and found a fortune in toilet paper and disinfectants and cases of chips, sodas and jerky! We loaded it all down in a push cart and left it for later and headed for the other tool crib. “Well shit daddy! how’d you miss that fine ass little bike?!”

Cooed Monique, pointing at the metallic purple quad with the propane adapted motor. "The one I got was just sitting over there, I didn't have to break no locks to get at it, I just grabbed it and split. This tool crib has a master lock I doubt we could shoot off! Monica grinned wickedly. "Get your ass out of the way and let this New Orleans gang banger bitch do what she does daddy!" Purred Monique as she pulled out a worn leather wallet full of lock picks, within thirty seconds it was open! "I'm losing my touch, I should have had it open in half the damn time!" She fumed as we slid the gate to one side. As we rounded the corner, there they were! Four brand new propane powered pickups just sitting there. We looked at each other and grinned like cheetahs eating liver! "Aw screw them bikes and that fork lift thing, we riding high and in style dad, lets charge us some batteries!" Laughed Monique!

Sarge eyed me suspiciously as I pulled up to the check point for my monthly allotment of food. "Where the hell did you get the gas for this ride? LET ALONE THE RIDE?!" He said gaping at my truck. "I found a propane conversion kit at the local swap shop and I studied up on brewing methane, but really, right now its on propane, lots of propane out there you know? I had a dozen tanks myself." I grinned at him. "Yeah right, you know looting is still illegal right? If I thought you'd stole this thing, I'd have to confiscate it!" He growled. "Oh, but I have my papers right here!" I grinned, handing him a stack of old cash, all hundreds. "I need a favor, I got another mouth to feed but she won't come in, she's an illegal alien and she thinks we still deport folks like her. I need double rations." I said as I shined a ten ounce gold bar in the early dawn sunlight. Sarge scowled and fiddled with some papers and handed them to me and snatched the gold bar. I'll hook you up this time, have your senorita fill them out and bring them back next month or you won't get any more extras, be sure to fill out the part that says she's invalid." He said. "Not buying any ammo this month?" He asked. "Nah, been pretty quiet, had a pack of dogs or coyotes come by, but they left quick enough." I laughed. Sarge nodded. "Just show those papers at the trucks when you load up or you won't get any extra...you got any more of these gold bars? I have a private who's lost two rifles already because he's an inbred retard, one more and I can kick him out. Really, you'd be doing me a favor..." he sighed. "I handed him another gold bar, "If he loses his load out of ammo too, I'm in!" I grinned. "He will, I'm sure of it!" The Sergeant grinned back, see me here about dark. Now get in there, there's a line forming." He laughed.

Around dark, I slid into the checkpoint quietly on my bike, Sarge met me and waved me into the shadows and dropped a full back pack into

my carry box as well as a rifle and full gear belt, including a pistol! “the dumb son of a bitch lost his whole load out of gear, he’s on his way back to Alabama in the morning!” Sarge snickered quietly. “Now get out of here, we’re closing shop for this month, bring more gold, I think I got all kinds of shit you’d like to have!” He chuckled wickedly. I pulled into my place well after dark, Monique already had a fire going in my wood stove, Princess and Duke were cuddled up on the couch purring away, I smelled food cooking. “Dinner is almost done old Tom, I ain’t no cook like you, but I do OK, we got breaded deer tenderloin, gravy, grits, biscuits, and dandelion greens! Uh, where did you get that gear Tom? You didn’t roll a soldier did you?” she gasped. “Nah, I bought it! Rifle and all! I figure the guns and ammo were worth that gold bar, there’s a med kit and MREs in here too, and some other stuff, anyway. I figured we could use it. Wanna look after dinner?” I laughed.

Dinner was great, Monique actually was a great cook, afterwards we smoked a bowl and snooped in the pack, in addition to the usual soldier gear, he had a decent hunting knife and a hatchet, a multitool, flashlight, and the secret to private “Alabama’s” greatness, a hundred Dexedrine tablets! “The idiot was speeding his titties off!” Laughed Monique! She picked up a uniform shirt and looked at the name tag:

“Willis” I knew a private Willis, that poor Alabama boy couldn’t stick his finger up his butt with both hands, help and a road map!” She chuckled. “Alabama you say? That was where the sarge said he was from!” I laughed. “Sarge said he kept losing his equipment!” I said. “That be him! he’d lose his head if it wasn’t bolted on!” Monique laughed hysterically! “He’s been bounced from unit to unit since he joined up! I heard he was section eight from the army, wonder why the guard took him?” She mused as she took off her shirt. “You feel up to a little fun old man? My booty needs attention and you the only man here!” She giggled.

Spring came early, Monique and I will be having our kid sometime in the fall, about the same time as Princess and duke have theirs, they’ll grow up together watching the deer and zebra graze and the monkeys fight the squirrels for nuts, they’re saying we’ll have a radio station up on the east coast by then, maybe television too! Time to raid a store or two before then, I want a hundred inch Plasma monitor! The end.

I tried pretty hard to censor most of the toilet talk, sex and over the top violence out of this one, but IT is a detective story, it gets gritty in spots, but nothing too rough. I had to leave a little trash talk in because it would read stupid if I didn't. Anyway, if you like 60's style gumshoe dramas and science fiction, have at it! I have the uncensored version on request with all the sweaty stuff, violence, and cussing if you want it. :)

**Having not read the whole book, many characterers and events won't mean anything to you, but not a bad read. ENJOY! This story takes place in the universe of the twin empires with cat people aliens, space travel etc, go read my other stuff about it to get better filled in!
[Magus.](#)**

The defective detective:

Shyn'Staa looked over my paperwork with a puzzled look on her face. "I am not to be understanding, how are you to being a defective?" she asked. "DETECTIVE Madam Sheriff, it's a kind of peace keeper that looks into crimes and normally probes them to find the culprit guilty or sometimes exonerate them, But yes, you could say I am DEFECTIVE, I shot someone the law would have let go, even though they were guilty as sin and I was terminated." Shyn'Staa wrinkled her brow at me. "But you made good justice, I am not to be understanding this, it being confusing to me." I laughed. "On Earth, Justice and the law are not the same thing, it's more money and politics than justice. We have one set of laws for the poor and one for the powerful." I sighed. Shyn'Staa's ears lay back! "THAT being poor justice! A blasphemy to our goddess it is being!" She hissed! I nodded. "That's why I'm here, I heard Lyrians took Justice seriously!" She looked at me slyly. "So if there being a bank robber who has killed two, injured more, and he is being cornered by you, what do you do?" She asked. "In a perfect world, I'd put two hundred and fifty grains of bronze through his skull and save jury time and feeding the sorry bastard, but I'll deal with him any way I'm told." Shyn'Staa grinned. "Tempted to make you a constable I am, but you are beyond qualified, and this Detective concept intrigues me, SO... I am to be granting you a special license to be showing me what a detective is being, If I like, I am to be telling Arch Constable Sha'Zyn we need. You are to be having one year, if not maybe I make you a Constable anyway, always to be needing more!" She purred.

I liked Lyrian's Justice system, in a squad of four, you had a constable and three troopers, if you were caught in the act or were known to have done a crime, you got judged on the spot, if there was any doubt, you might get a jury trial consisting of four Constables and the Sheriff, if there was still any doubt, you were held in comfortable

conditions while investigations continued, then if convicted, they got uncomfortable and they put you to work! The better you work and behave, the better the food and conditions, act up or refuse to work or try to escape and life got hard and short fast as they feed trouble makers to their Kay'hawghs! on a side note, one might also be conscripted as a trooper under the right conditions such as being fast and strong or being military trained. Those conscripted generally stay on after their time is up since being a peacekeeper is a decent life, and unlike back on Earth where cops are feared and hated, peacekeepers are generally adored as beneficial guardians of the people here, and although required to be fed at restaurants for half price, most will feed them for free! Nice deal huh? I looked over my new license and badge, I am "Justice Investigator one." I have authority of arrest, a concealed weapons license, the right to wear civilian clothing and the right to break and enter and spy on people if I get permission first from Shyn'Staa. I studied Lyrian laws on my way here, they have about a hundred page book, we have whole libraries complete with loopholes on how to defeat them, Shyn'Staa would have a fit! And I think Lawyers would be an abomination to the goddess S'Kaat! Hell, I hate them myself. Well, time to inspect my office! Four rooms including the toilet which has a small shower, a waiting room with a Tygellian secretary, nice rack. Computer interface for her and typical office whatnots and a couch for customers and a nice espresso machine! I availed myself of a cup and turned to the Tyg girl at the desk. "What's your name sunshine?" I asked. "I am Thuleh, I almost washed out of the peacekeepers but Shyn'Staa gave me the chance to serve you here while I study to retry my final semester!" She smiled. "Ah, so you might be capable of handling yourself in a minor scrap huh?" I asked. She smiled sweetly and laid a dura-chromed 44 auto pistol on the desk and one of those ice pick-like Tygellian shanks beside it. "Remind me if I get behind on your raises will you Thuleh?" I laughed. OK, first job, find me a Lyrian tailor who will work with leather and a Terran clothing dealer who carries full length leather trench coats and a tactical distributor who sells soft body armor panels and titanium chain mail. After that, have all my stuff sent up here I'll place it myself. When Thuleh looked up at me, I saw on her delicate neck, the ugly chain tattoo of a sex slave on Tygel. I pulled out my wallet and handed her five hundred credits. "And go buy yourself a nice choker necklace that covers that damned mark on your neck, I won't have people disrespecting or hassling you over your past, I might have to give them good justice and break their damn jaw." She held the money to her bosom and looked at me

warmly a moment. "You are nothing like I expected Earth man, in fact You are nothing like any man I know! Thank you!" she exclaimed! "Yeah, I don't seem to follow any norms no matter where I am. ANY WAY, after this you can take the rest of the day off while I get set up and start my informant network.

I hit the streets and started casing the alleys, it did not take long before I found a group of Lyrian trash diver kids poking around in a dumpster, they clustered together protectively as I approached. "Hi there half-cubs, could I talk to your pack leader a moment?" I asked through my transcom. "I am being leader!" Said a nearly grown Lyrian girl stepping from the shadows, she held a chunk of sharpened steel reinforcing rod at the ready. "What you being to want Terra man?" She spat. "I want to give you and your friends this sack of double cheeseburgers while we chat." I produced the burgers and revealed my badge, her eyes got big and she dropped the rod. "What to be needing peacekeeper? We only to be looking for food? This place not to care if we eat their trash. They even give us sometimes!" She said in a whisper. "Food first, business later!" I told her as I passed out the burgers, THEN I'll be offering you a sweet deal!" She looked at me apprehensively a moment before cramming half the burger in her face.

"You see kid, I'm a detective, like peacekeepers, I arrest bad people and I collect a reward for doing so, and I'm hiring eyes and ears on the street. IF you give me a credible report, you get one of these." and I handed her a ten credit note, "IF your report gets an arrest, you get one of these." and I handed her a hundred credits. "And if there is a bounty, you get a cut of it." Her eyes got big and her mouth dropped but she said nothing. "You kids come and go as you please, nobody sees you, and if they do, they don't care, here's your chance to get back on those snobs AND make money doing it and all legal too!" She clutched the money to her bosom and nodded vigorously! I handed her a most wanted sheet and my card. "IF you see any of these criminals, DO NOT approach them, you call that number on the card and give my secretary all the details, then go back to your life, I'll find you in a few days or you can come to my office, and if it went well, it's payday!" She nodded and grinned. "Your code name is Cinnamon." Just so I'll know who it is I'm paying." She grinned. "That being fine, parents take my name when I am being cast out because Tychanite poisoning robbed me of a tail! When I am rich from doing this I will mock my parents for sifting dirt for pay!" I nodded, good justice, Na'Khaan told everyone to stop with the casting out shit, but some of them still did it. "My friends to be getting code names and cards too

inspector person?" Cinnamon purred. "Why not?" I laughed. After I handed out "Spike, Crowbar, Nun, and pickle" their names they began jabbering in street speak a moment and as one they pointed to the restaurant across the street and then to number three on the local shit list, then five. "We see these two come sometimes at night, strange thing to be happening, the night light goes out and a few minutes later a van comes, humans get out with luggage and go in, most times we see this one, but sometimes the other as well being, they come right back out without luggage and go!" She purred. I looked at the wanted sheet, both were wanted for dealing stims and brain eater, that junk killed brain cells so fast you could hear a user getting stupid as you watched, addictive as hell, but the high supreme they said. "Stupidity is bliss." I mused as I called Shyn'Staa. Three days into the stake out, sure enough, the light went out and the van arrived. We swarmed in right after them with our "writ of search" which is somewhat like a Terran search warrant but allows anything illegal to be seized and used as evidence. We scored big time, we nabbed three, five and seven on the most wanted list, enough brain eater to turn all of Terra side into drooling morons, almost a ton of unregulated stim powder, several illegal weapons, and a pound of good old fashioned heroin, ah and bonus points for their computer which had the names and addresses for fifty dealers! Shyn'Staa grinned as she counted out my bounty and bonus. "How to be doing Terra man? Thuleh to be telling me you are not even to be set up in your office yet!" She purred. "I exist to impress lady Sheriff Shyn'Staa, not all Terran justice methods suck." I grinned at her. Just then her husband, H-K planetary Constable Inferno walked in, he was wearing black armor and carrying a flame thrower mini gun hybrid, this guy was a walking mountain of muscle. "Captives ready to be given good justice my Captain, they will be forced to eat their own poison!" He rumbled, he suddenly looked at me, I felt my anus constrict! "I know you. I saw you on televid on Earth, you shot that Senator's brat, the child molester!" He said. "Right through his damned head and I'd do it again and again every morning until doomsday, he deserved to die for what he did to that little girl!" I said as matter of fact as death. Inferno leaned close, I could see him grin under his fire proof helmet. "In the name of S'Kaat I welcome you then, GOOD JUSTICE!" He said warmly. "He is to being doing good justice here already my love, the three most wanted and their dealers he was to be collecting for judgment!" Purred Shyn'Staa. The mountainous Hunter killer nodded. To be speaking to chief Justice Slang about you, maybe we will study your methods?" He said.

So I got back to my office to find Cinnamon, Nun, Spike, crowbar and pickle sitting on the couch in my waiting room. "These trash diver kids claim they know you, what do they want paid for?" Thuleh sighed as she sprayed air freshener in their direction, I noted she was wearing the necklace I bought her. "Not trash divers my dear Thuleh, they are assistant investigators, or will be as soon as I go to the hall of records and get them instated as citizens and get them all bank accounts and credit sticks. "Credit sticks?" chirped Cinnamon. "But why?" I grinned at her. "It's not safe to be carrying as much as this in paper, tends to attract scumbags, besides. You need I.D and a cred stick to get rooms. You have jobs now, you're real people again, just...do us a favor and wash up and change to clean clothes before your next visit, you're no longer hums, you just have to look like one on duty. Thuleh stared at me oddly.

We went to the hall of records and after a fast flash of my badge and a reasonable bribe to expedite things, Cinnamon, Crowbar, Nun, Spike and Pickle became T'Hoth, Shin'Syn, Khan'kopher, Kh'Nule and Lo'hobit again and we headed off to Terra bank and trust, then I rented them a four bedroom miner's apartment on the sifter side of town, then ordered dinner and paid them, then I laid down the ground rules!

When on duty, wear only trash diver clothes.

**This is a secret, telling the wrong person can get you killed fast!
If stopped by a peacekeeper, be polite and have them contact me,
tell them you are doing S'Kaat's business.**

Check in with me daily.

If something seems out of place, study it, might be a payday!

Do NOT flaunt your money! If I see you blowing it on jewelry or junk to impress people that hate you, I'll think you're an idiot and find a new set of eyes! Discretion is everything, subtlety is your new trade!

And if you have any questions about something, call me any time!

Then I handed out secure satcom phones and a personal gift, Assistant detective badges with their code names on them and left for the office, On the way back, I passed the galactic deli and bought Thuleh and I dinner. I remembered a few Tygellian foods and some Terran stuff I knew they were fond of and piled her thermoplate high with it, I myself got steak and gravy with slaw and potatoes and cherry cobbler and a half gallon of lime soda in its own ice sleeve and two cups of ice. As I presented my secretary with her plate, Shyn'Staa and three peacekeepers walked in, before I could speak, she held up her hand. "What is this Thuleh is to be telling me about you hiring trash divers for something? Reward money is not for to be

giving to garbage divers, it being for delivering good justice!" She hissed. "Well then, let me introduce you to the concept of a SNITCH, lady Sheriff, I plan to have multitudes of them. You take a person near or even inside the criminal culture, you pick them out, clean them off, give them a way out, and presto! You have extra eyes and ears on the street, and soon you know every move that happens in the shadows you and your Peacekeepers are far from. it's an old practice on Earth, besides, I noticed you have your own snitch in with me." I said gesturing to Thuleh, she hung her head. "Not a problem, I expected it, it is good justice." I smiled at her wryly. "And good justice is for everyone, even trash divers right?" Shyn'Staa hung her head. "You are to be shaming me Terran man. Yes it is, all being equal in the shadow of S'Kaat. I am to be learning Detective, continue as you will, I am to be learning." Wait until we run a drag net or a sting, you'll love it!... and even perpetrators not guilty of the crime in question will live in fear for days! Some will even cut deals to inform or tell about other crimes to save their hide!" Her eyes got large! "Such a powerful tool this dragnet is being, tell me more!" She purred. "A Dragnet is when you have a criminal nobody knows who is, like say the fuel rod bandit, you pull in everyone ever convicted of theft or buying stolen goods and question them, give them the idea you think it might be them, talk to them real mean, threaten and yell a lot, then send in another peacekeeper after a bit that is nice, give them tea or something and subtly offer them deals for info, maybe promise to overlook some prior misbehavior or give rewards for leads, this is called "good cop bad cop" by the way and boy, does it work! Shyn'Staa grinned at me suddenly and pulled out her satphone "Hello? To be gathering all available Peacekeepers, we are to be having a drag net tonight and to be fishing for justice!" She purred. "This idea to being worth much Terra man, rewarding you much I will be doing!" She purred, and with that, she left. I saw Thuleh staring at her plate looking downcast. "Something wrong babe?" I asked her. "I'm sorry." She whispered. "I was told..." I caressed her hand. "No harm, no foul kid, you had the decency to tell me who you were up front, I expected it." She smiled weakly. "You're not angry? Not even a little?" she said softly. "Nope. How is dinner? I tried to get something you might like." She sighed and caressed herself in an almost sexual manner. "Very good, I love coleslaw and seafood salad... YOU KNOW, you really are like no man I have ever met! If you had been my master, I would have stayed even after the emancipation of slaves! You are far from handsome, but the manner in which you treat me and others makes me want to lay with you!"

Her breaths were coming short, fast and soft! I took her hand and kissed it gently and looked into her big, blue, crazy eyes, her lips were trembling. "Take it slow babe, I'm nice to everybody! We just met you know? But yeah, I like you too! But let's get to know each other a bit better a few days, you might find out I'm just a pretentious asshole who fakes it good!" She looked at me fiercely a moment and grabbed my hands and placed them firmly on her breasts! "Don't make me beg master! Shyn'Staa will never know, I swear it!" She snarled. I studied her a moment and kissed her, she returned it with quite a bit of passion. "After hours, when we're off the clock, we owe that much to Shyn'Staa!" She nodded and licked her lips like a lioness eating a zebra! "On Tygel, we slaves never learned social graces or the arts of securing a mate, so when we want someone, we say so! I am saying so Earth man!" I put my arms around her. "Anticipation makes it better Thuleh! we'll go out to dinner and then get a nice room and have some fun then!" I said. She pulled me tighter, the scent of her perfume was driving me nuts! And she licked me erotically on the cheek. Just then the office phone rang, it was the Lyrian tailor. He had my modified trench coat and fedora ready.

"To being modified exactly as you were requesting, hard ballistic armor plates over the vital areas, titanium chain mail across the underarms and down the arms, elbows covered in soft ballistic armor cloth, shoulders padded and covered in hard armor, they are being, many, many pockets there being with special attention paid to tablet, satphone and forensic kit measurements given with expansion and contraction being possible by velcro. The hat being lined with titanium mail and a hard armor plate across the eyes and top of head with pockets for cell phone, knife, tactical light and handcuff keys there being inside! Everything being sewn with ballistic Kevlar thread as specified then waterproofed!" The old Lyrian grinned. "A masterpiece if I am to being to say so! Most of it was to have to being done by hand!" He purred as I admired his work, it was perfect! It was then he saw my Peacekeeper's badge and became downcast, he believed I would demand a discount, but I laid the agreed on amount on the table in front of him plus a two hundred credit tip. "Honest work gets honest pay! I'll be ordering more of these as this one will likely go through hell." I said as he counted his credits and did the Lyrian sign for gratitude. "Keep my specs on file, I may just sell a few of these for you if you like." The old cat nodded and grinned. I got back to the office a few minutes before closing time, Thuleh was no where to be seen, I hope she didn't think I blew her off! I noted the rest of my stuff had arrived, I'd get up early and finish off

my apartment and office, I mused as I went into my office and hung up my coat and hat, I turned to see Thuleh sitting on my desk, her dress was hanging on the hook on the bathroom door, she herself was as naked as she came from the womb!

The damned alarm clock came too early as it and every satphone, wavecom and cell phone I owned began to beep, telling me it was 0600 hours. Thuleh had spent the night, she grimaced and buried her face into the pillow as I shut everything off and re set everything to silent from my master app on the cellphone. "You stay put darling, you're not due in for three hours yet!" I told her. "You are the best master I've ever had! Will you keep me?"

She whispered. "Of course baby, but you have to stop calling me master, you're a free woman!" I told her, her response freaked me out! "NO!" She snarled! "You are my master!" she hissed in something like desperation! "Have it your way Thuleh!" I gasped as I pulled away. "Master it is!" She smiled at me erotically. "You don't understand master, L...WE need a master, we can not function without one, we do not feel safe or complete without one, it is how we were bred, raised and trained!" She looked downcast. "Being free is pure hell Master! Take care of me, tell me your wishes, I will serve you gladly, just don't send me away!" She wept. I kissed her. "No kid, you and me from now on it seems! But what will you do if some day I never come home again? it's highly likely in my line of work!" She began to weep bitterly. "Then I will throw myself on your grave and end my life so I may serve you in the afterlife!" She snarled resolutely! "Jesus, Buddha and Lucifer, she's serious!" I thought. "And here I thought I just had to watch out for the Lyrian females about this kind of thing! Meh, I could do MUCH worse." and off I went to start my day. Around 1200 Cinnamon, AKA T'Hoht paid me a visit. "I am to be seeing with my own eyes a Tygel man to be selling "Brain eater" capsules near the high school out of a white van, serial being 12443AH 03, here being his GPS when doing crime!" I rubbed her ears and peeled her off a ten credit note and got on my satphone. "Deadhead dealer at city GPS 1824 x 1766 North, seems to drift by right after school." Shyn'Staa hissed back. "Arresting him yourself being, Dagnet being very effective, all peacekeepers to being busy, all cells full of criminals, solving many many old crimes we are being, no back up being available for now being, so sorry." And she hung up. "Well shit, time to earn my bonuses the hard way! I mused as I strapped on my 44 magnum and my armored trench coat. "Stay here and watch the farm Thuleh, I have to go bust a deadhead dealer at the high school, no big deal." Her eyes got wide. "Be careful master." she said downcast.

I cased the area and discovered the van, vehicle ID matched. I saw several high school kids come and go, one even stopped to pop a couple of the black and green capsules, on the Amass home-world, they were a legal and effective pain killer for the cold blooded Amass, but to Humans, Tygel, Lyrians and Dolorians they were a brain destroying stimulant and hallucinogen as they seemed to slow time dramatically. I sauntered up to the van. "You got any brain eater? I've had a shit day I need to forget." I said conspiratorially. The Tyg kid hesitated, then held up a sack full of deadhead capsules. "Just a hundred creds Earth dude." He grinned. I grabbed his arm, jerked him out the window and slammed him on the street and was about to cuff him when his unseen partner came from the back of the van, a burst of nickel plated kill shot from a shotgun bounced off my back, I jerked my 44 to answer him, but when I turned, he was just standing there, his eyes crossed, focused in on the three inches of pointed steel poking out of his forehead as he slowly dropped to his knees, then onto his face, the impact popped the Tygellian dagger out of his skull like a champagne cork, there stood Thuleh, her pistol drawn. "Master, I am still an on duty peacekeeper! Despite being relegated to office duty work." She said flatly. "You're taking a Terran course in crime investigation next term...PARTNER!" I said. "I'm paying!" Thuleh grinned broadly. I looked at the perp I had my foot on the back of. "After I get him zipped, frisk this death dealing scumbag, I have to call Shyn'Staa and tell her we had to kill one." I sighed.

Shyn'Staa was pretty cavalier about the incident. "Good justice, tell Thuleh, good job, Jails are to being full anyway. I am to be giving Thuleh to you now, to be training as detective, but splitting the reward between you this time I will be." She laughed. My next call was to Sn'Juleh the Lyrian tailor. "Your coat just saved my life, I'll be needing a spare one in my measurements and one in the measurements I'll bring you, when I get the new one I'll leave this one for repairs, it has a few holes in it now!" I heard him purr deeply. "It will be so honored customer!" He said and hung up. "Fancy a coat like mine Thuleh? Call it a wedding gift!" Her eyes lit up! "But who is getting married?" She asked looking around sheepishly. I pointed to me, then her, I swear I could hear my spine and ribs creaking when she hugged me!

Cinnamon was in early, she was clean and dressed sensibly, she held a dwarf Lyrian by the hand, he couldn't have been more than ten! "This being Ashes, Ashes, to be telling nice detective what you have been being to see." He looked at me in terror a moment. "I was to see white skinned Terran man and yellow skinned Terran man fighting in

Ludhkho's alley it was being, they pull knives out and the white skinned one was to be killing the yellow skinned one, then to be stuffing him under the drain grate and leaving!" I handed the cub a ten credit note and buzzed Shyn'Staa. "We got a possible murder boss, meet me behind Ludhkho's." I turned to the cub. "Show me kid, Thuleh, gear up and bring my coat, I got to find my forensics kit in these boxes!" Fortunately I had the foresight to label the contents of my moving boxes and in a few moments we were on our way! When we got there, the cub ran up to the grate and pointed, I hit it with my blood light, yup! Blood everywhere, a nice trail leading from the alley too, the killer was wounded as well! I pulled up the grate and sure enough, one stiff Asian male! I did a face scan on the corpse, Li Wong, small time muscle and possible hit man for the Sexton crime family on earth, So was the other guy a victim who fought back or a rival gang member? "I got on the phone to Shyn'Staa who was still in route... "I need a list of everyone treated for stab wounds on both sides of dome in the past twenty four hours, the killer was cut up pretty good!" I heard her purr... "I will being to have it by the time I am to be getting there, much traffic there is being today!" She growled. I turned to Thuleh and handed her a red roll of stickem up crime scene tape. "Help me cordon this area off and keep civilians out until the boss arrives, Cinnamon, get scarce, leave the cub here, he's eating well for a few nights until we catch the killer!" She smiled warmly and disappeared into the alley shadows like a ghost. Ashes looked at me unsure. "you are a witness to a serious crime, that makes you important! You like bacon cheeseburgers kid?" He nodded emphatically. Shyn'Staa and a squad pulled in a moment later. "To be rounding up knife wound victims from yesterday as we speak, where being worm fuel Terran? OH. I have not to be seeing a Terran with skin being yellow before, it a shame being, kind of pretty." She mused. "Oh well. To be pulling him out of illegal grave and to be having a look at him. I pulled on my rubber duratex gloves and jerked him out of the drain, he still had a Terran combat knife tight in his dead hand. "Thuleh, take notes. Terran issue combat knife, looks like 103rd regiment screaming demons battalion, let's see if it's his or he picked it up somewhere, note there is blood on the blade that may not be his, we'll do a DNA test on it and grab a sample from the drops leading away from the crime scene, we'll know who his attacker or victim was then!" I leaned in further with my blood light, there on his lapel was a finger nail! I bagged it for further DNA evidence. "Thuleh, note that the killer is missing part of a finger nail. Might help us identify him." She nodded and continued to write. I opened the shirt

on the stiff, He had military ID tags on, I carefully removed them. "Note also, the corpse has 103rd regiment dog tags." I examined the wounds. "Note the cuts were made by a 1" wide blade, possibly serrated or heavily chipped, also from the angle of the wound, the killer was left handed and knew how to strike, went up and under his ribs you see?" Thuleh continued to write. "I am thinking the guy who smoked him was trained, possibly also former military. Maybe an old blood debt from the civil wars?" I mused aloud. Shyn'Staa stood to one side, her tail was swishing slowly, like a cat contemplating an oblivious mouse. "To being very impressed I am being!" She purred. "A very long and mutually profitable relationship together I am seeing! I am to be thinking ALL my Constables to be taking your training from now on!" I had to laugh. "This is just meat ball investigation, wait until we go over the alley with a fine tooth comb and the forensic coroner has a go at it!" Just then Shyn'Staa's phone rang. After a moment, she hung up. She looked downcast. "To being all over, we are to be having the killer, he was to being confessing to all, and his story about it being self defense to be agreeing with the cub saying so, To be letting him go tomorrow." My bullshit alarm went off in my head! "NO Captain, there is more here than meets the eyes, hold him until I get to grill him a bit more...Why did he hide the body if it was clear cut self defense? Everyone knows Lyrian law respects self defense and a fair fight!" Shyn'Staa's eyes got big and she whipped out her satphone as I picked up Ashes. "Bacon cheeseburger time for you kid, then you're coming home with me, you're in protective custody!" The kid purred and nodded. I think my office has a new mascot.

"Leon Walkins...Ex American Marine, dishonorable discharge for drug dealing and use, arrested for various petty crimes over the decade following, finally deported to Ra'Leph just as the Na'Khaan took over for assault and battery, this sound about right to you Leon?" He looked at me blankly a moment. "I've kept my nose clean since then haven't I boss? I got a nice claim, a pretty Lyrian squaw and we adopted a cub, Ra'Leph changed me boss, it's like it cleaned out my whole soul! I don't wanna' go back to being no bum no more, I got it nice here and I won't let nobody take what I got now away from me, NOT NEVER!" He snarled, straining on the table cuffs. "Relax Leon, I just want to know why you hid Wong's carcass under the drain grate, you must have known that the locals would have wrote it off as a fair fight and self defense!" I said. "Li was my old drug smugglin' buddy from the wars, got himself hooked up nice with the Sexton syndicates after he got out, he looked me up because I got skills as a mule and

smugglin' but I wouldn't go for it, done learned that kind of easy money just buys a nice funeral later on dig me? So he gets pissed and pulls a knife on me and starts talking shit about my wife and cub and how he'll make rugs out of them, and I went full commando on his ass. When the syndicate finds out I offed him, I'm dead! Boss, my wife and baby, they're in danger man, you got to help!" I buzzed Shyn'Staa. "Go get Leon's wife and cub and bring them in for protective custody, we're onto something huge here! Maybe shutting down a hell of a lot of the illegal drug trade on Ra'Leph!" I heard her purr a second. "Easily done Detective, they are both sitting outside my office door waiting to see Leon." I grinned and turned to Leon. "Want to make some money and cover this up at the same time?" I asked him. "We'll let you get you back in touch with the Sextons, first thing you do is ask where your buddy Li went, then we'll release the story he was robbed and killed by some street gang and do away with your medical and police records, and you get a nano tracker implanted and when you mule their junk, we'll bust the lot of you and then make you disappear with a new name and sat you up nice with a fat reward!" I said conspiratorially. Leon looked at me dumbly a moment as it sank in, then he grinned.

As I left the interrogation room, I noted a few junior peacekeepers in the midst of celebration, I asked what was up. "The power core bandit just got nailed after thirty years! His whole dwelling was full, top to bottom of glowing Trilithium cores, thousands of credits worth, maybe hundreds of thousands." Good thing Trilithium radiation isn't Dangerous! I mused. I passed Shyn'Staa, she was grinning broadly. Three sheriffs come and go, one now oversees Ra'Leph, One married to Great Na'Khaan, but who catches the power core bandit? MY SQUAD! Dagnet being most powerful tool of justice! Having much status and things to lord over everyone now I am having! You I am having to thank I am!" She purred. "To be giving you the honor of sentencing the annoying perpetrator! "For grand theft in many counts and possession of stolen property, I conscript him to no less than ten years without parole to wash, wax and refuel all peacekeeper vehicles without a day off save for funerals or family tragedy." I said. Shyn'Staa grinned even broader, I could admire the old girl's every fang! "GOOD JUSTICE!" she purred.

Ashes sat on Thuleth's desk munching his third bacon deluxe cheeseburger, only stopping to slurp his mega-giant vanilla milkshake. He was purring like a sports car motor. "You like it here huh kid?" I laughed. He nodded and kept eating. "Why don't you consider hanging around as our office mascot? I can't pay much, but

you can help Thuleh with the files and tidy up on occasion, and it's a warm and free place to sleep." Ashes nodded emphatically and belched "THANK YOU!" Just then Cinnamon, AKA T'Hoth burst in the office! "BAD men take Shyn'Syn into the old office building, I am to be thinking they make her do fuck-fuck! Come to help please, she being so young!" She yowled. I threw on my coat and grabbed my riot gun and called to Thuleh to watch my back as I followed T'Hoth at a dead run and keyed my Peacekeeper satcom. "Violent assault and possible rape, in pursuit, follow my GPS to location!" I bawled into the mic! Half a block later we entered the old Galaxy Loan company office to find two drunken Tygellian miners in the very act! I seemed to step outside myself as I jacked a round of kill shot into the pipe and blew head of the one violating her into a pink mist! The other released her and made to surrender, but I let him kiss the riot gun's steel butt plate instead.

Again.

And again.

And again.

And again.

Until he was no longer twitching,

OR breathing for that matter!

I scooped the convulsing girl into my arms and held her to me. "Hold on Shyn'Syn, the ambulance is coming kid!" She looked at me with her big eyes full of pain, she was purring throatily. I knew Lyrians did that when they were in agony. I faintly heard Thuleh calling in the peacekeeper medical unit. "Shots fired, med-techs needed urgently, perpetrators caught in the act, given good justice, incident concluded." I heard her say, like I was dreaming..."You came Detective person! You were to be saving me! You are being like the family I had before they...threw me away... they.." She snuggled into my chest and passed out from shock. By then the ambulance arrived, I told the technicians... "That is an assistant Peacekeeper detective! You give her the same care as you would a Peacekeeper or by the gods you will answer to me!" They looked at the puddle of gore I'd left of her assailants and snapped to work!

Shyn'Staa looked at me narrowly over the incident report, I could tell she was looking at my soul. "And since when being did I allow you the authority to judge and make justice?" She hissed angrily. "The other day with the fuel core bandit, don't you remember? I sentenced him to ten.... "THAT BEING JUST FOR HIM!" She snarled. "Look boss, I know they're just trash divers to you, but they're like MY kids! Would you fault a Lyrian or hell, even human father for doing the same?"

Shyn'Staa howled in rage and slapped the desk with her palms repeatedly before folding her hands behind her head and touching her forehead to the desk blotter and sighing long and hard. "To be giving me your license detective... probationary license to render judgment approved, watching your justice closely we will be!" She stamped my license and laid her head back down. "To be getting your bounty from the front desk today, too pissed off at you to look at you further I am being! But... Good justice anyway!" She sighed.

Shyn'Syn's eyes fluttered open and she looked around in terror a moment. "Relax kiddo, you're at the hospital. Those rats stretched your plumbing pretty bad, but the doctors say you'll be alright in a week!" I told her. She relaxed into her bed. "Those bad ones were to be hurting me very much Detectiveperson...But you came, you were to be saving me! Great Na'Khaan on Sul'Taa to be forgetting us here on Ra'Leph, YOU are being our Na'Khaan now! Everyone to see you stand up for us, help us, even to kill to save us! Elder mother S'Kaat to be sending you to us to give us justice too!" She purred snuggling my hand. "I'm not nothing like that kid!" I stammered! "I'm your friend, on earth we catch each others backs! Nothing spiritual about me kid, I was just looking out for my own!" She purred as her sedatives kicked in again. "Great Na'Khaan will not accept his destiny until he has done it... the holy books are to be saying so." and with that, went to sleep. I left some flowers and told the attendant that whatever she wants to eat, order it in and put it on my bill, I'd be back. On my way back to the office, I passed three young male Lyrian trash divers. "Uhr'Gnn Ha' Seidah Na'Khaan! Fer Hn Saada!" one called one as they crossed their arms over their chests and bowed their heads reverently before scurrying away. "What rubbish! I am to swear those trash divers are to be getting crazier every day!" Hissed an old Lyrian woman. "Everyone knows Great Na'Khaan lives on Sul'Taa!" I was puzzled. "What did he say lady?" I asked? She waved her hand dismissively. "OUR Na'Khaan walks among us, we know his scent!...what garbage!" I nodded. My day was just starting to get strange, when I got to the office, I noticed the walkway had been cleaned spotless and lined with white flowers, there was a little shrine erected next to the door with candles, a bundle of those dragon-fly like bugs the Lyrians eat, with their wings and heads removed, a pile of loose change and an overly heroic drawing of me holding my shotgun over my head with my foot on a headless body. I scooped up the change, the picture, and the bugs for Ashes, gratitude or not, I ain't eating bugs. I went inside to find T'Hoth, Khan'kophera, Kh'Nule and Lo'hobit waiting. I tossed Ashes

the bugs. "Snack kid!" I laughed. "So what's up kids? You got me something?" I asked the furry quartet. They crossed their arms over their chests and bowed their heads. "We bring thanks for saving our street sister, many saw you make good justice on those who hurt her, not even Peacekeepers of our own kind would have done so, us being dirt in their eyes, we also bring this!" and she handed me what looked like a crime sheet for the last two days, BUT hand written and WITH The perpetrators names included! I sat down hard on Thuleh's desk. "As you are to be saying Detectiveperson, we see many things, but no one sees us!" Purred T'Hoth. I nodded. "Look, you're grateful, I get it, you're welcome! But no more shrines O.K? This you gave me is fine! Give all of this you want, but no more shrines please?" T'Hoth nodded and grinned as I called Shyn'Staa. "Warm up the wagons boss, I think I just solved all the crimes in the last two days! My personal detective agency's way of thanking me for protecting one of their own!" I could hear the old girl gasp!

Forty three crimes informed on, six not even reported yet, thirty eight solved to the satisfaction of the Constables, five pending further inquiry, Bounties, rewards and bonuses totaling seven hundred fifty thousand credits after I gave the kids their cut, Shyn'Staa was ecstatic.

I fired up my two credit cigar in the privacy of my office, Thuleh hated the smell. I had Ashes polishing my boots and leather coat with bio oil to waterproof them. Totally unprofessional, I kicked back, bare footed, drinking scotch and smoking while I sent a hyper-mail to Julio back on Terra. He was another defrocked detective who went too far in the eyes of the law! And what the hell, he was better than me!

Dear Julio, yes it's me, I'm not dead! LOL

**Get your shit together, kick out whatever turkey you're stuffing this week and come to Ra'Leph! They like our kind of justice out here and pay damn nice for it! I'll put my foot in the door for you if you decide to come, gotta pay better than the private circuits! Your pal,
Dead ace smoking!**

PS

Invest in some heavy hardware, we got dinosaur things here! The Local cops feed death worthy perps to them! LMAO!!!1 NO DEATH ROW RECORDS HERE YO!

I had just sent the message when Thuleh paged me on the intercom. "Two to see you Master... Um, BOSS! Can I send them in?" she purred. "Give me five minutes to tidy up a bit, I'm out of uniform." I heard her giggle. "Naughty man." then silence. I opened the windows, hid my booze, booted up and gave Ashes a twenty and shooed him out, and

in came...Well, were they garbage divers or sifters? male and female Lyrians dressed in ragged miner's uniforms, they had a baby Kay'Hawgh on a leash. "Na Terran Sul'Taa?" [Do you speak Lyrian Terran?] Asked the male. "N'aat Sul'Taa yah" [I do not speak Lyrian.] I said as I passed him my transcom. "This being good, not speaking any Terran at all, new in from Sul'Taa! Please to be helping us! Our daughter is to be missing, we tell Peacekeepers but we know we are to be nothing and not to care about outside the city anyway, Our friends inside say you make good justice, we can be to pay you!" And with that he laid a sack of probably fifty kilos of pure Tychanite on my desk, probably every cent the poor bastard had to his name! "Without your daughter, I can not take it, poor justice." I said pushing it back to him. "Right now I need her most recent picture, where she was seen last, who she was seen with and when. Give me your satcom number and GPS, if I can find her, I'll bring her home safe." The grimy couple grinned and did the Lyrian sign for thanks. It was an old story, old as the galaxy, good little miner's daughter gets mixed up with a bad crowd from the city, starts drinking, smoking nip and weed and mouthing off to her parents, next thing you know, she's a memory in the family photocube. If she was legal age, I'd write her off, but she's still a minor under Lyrian law. I put the word out on the streets and offered a reward, by night my kids had her ran down to a "studio" on Terra side that made adult movies, my gut told me it wasn't going to end well. I knocked on the front door, and eight hundred pound Tiger assault trooper answered. "I don't know you human, piss off, we don't want any!" he snarled. I stuck my badge in his face. "Open up or the next sound you hear will be plastic explosives blowing the door off its hinges and Tactical zipping and tripping you, smile you're on cop-camera Tiger, So no funny shit, We know who you are!" He held up his hands submissively. "I'm just security Captain! Who are you after?" he stuttered. "You got an underage actor on the premises, I'm either taking her home or taking the walls out! You know this girl?" I held up her picture. The big dum bass blinked at it a moment. "Sasha? Yeah, she's the new favorite around here, but dude, she's twenty!" I shook my head. "On Lyria that's seventeen, three years from legal, I'm busting the director and everyone who's screwed her for statutory rape! Now take me to her and I might let you slip away!" The orange monster swallowed hard and led me to the set. Well, there she was. A human in one end, a Tygellian in the other, she seemed to be enjoying herself immensely! "This is a bust! Everybody freeze! I'm shutting this dump down for producing kiddie porn, you

guys! One more poke and I'll run you in for statutory rape! She's still a minor under Lyrian law!" I shouted, the guys gang screwing her jumped back like she'd turned into a Kay'Hawgh! "You mess up my multiple organism you stupid Terra monkey!" Bawled Sah'Zhah (her ACTUAL name.) "What is this being?!" yowled the Lyrian director. "ALL my actors must to be submitting birth certifications! Sah'Zhah, please to be telling me this only being a misunderstanding? Please to say you did not trick me!" The little slut stuck her nose in the air and her lip out, but said nothing. "Well now, that changes things! I want all the original proofs of everything she's ever acted in brought outside and burned before I leave! Sah'Zhah, I find you guilty of identity fraud with the intent to defraud and misrepresentation of age with intent to defraud and sentence you to three years probation under your parent's care, any breaking probation by drug use, drinking booze or staying out past curfew and I'll be putting you in jail for the remainder of your sentence. "N000000000!" Bawled Sah'Zhah and she spat on me. "And six months more for assaulting a peace keeper." And with that, I cuffed her, stuck a bag on her head and took her home.

I perp walked the little bitch to the front door of her home, It was late so pops answered with a plasma caster in his hand, his eyes got wide as he saw his naked daughter, then I yanked the hood off her head.

"She's under three years probation for identity fraud, suspended provided she stays here for those three years, if she acts up in that time, tell me and she gets locked up!" I said. The old cat listened to his beat up transcom a moment nodding, then ran to get his mate and my bag of tychanite, his mate wasted no time screeching at her daughter and hissing. The transcom translated a bit of it. "Unfit for marriage now you are being! To send you home to Sul'Taa to live with your aunts, to be teaching you to be a priestess of the Elder Spirits they will be!" The old guy's ears went red and his ear talk showed embarrassment as he held out his sack of Tychanite, I picked out two crystals and handed it back. He looked puzzled. "This pays my fuel bill friend, go buy some clothes and mining equipment and get rich, that's pay enough. Remember, if she gets wild again, remind her sex in jail isn't fun! It's usually a fat Lesbian sitting on her face or a smelly prison guard with his baton up her butt." The old guy crossed his arms over his chest and bopped his head furiously in gratitude as I left into the sunrise for dome.

I had just gotten a good "welcome back" kiss from Thuleh when my satphone rang, it was Shyn'Staa. "To be coming to Peacekeeper prime at once, you are to be needed to investigate a murder!" she said.

Shyn'Staa led me to an office next to hers, two peacekeepers stood guard, one was weeping bitterly. Shyn'Staa opened the door to reveal her second in command field commander slumped over her desk in a pool of blood, her brains were blown all over the wall beside her, a combustion gun was still in her grasp, I noted the casing was a few feet away, from the logical angle of weapon use it should have been at our feet as we entered. I circled it and told Shyn'staa to stay put as I whipped out my detector light, the company tag powder on the casing was bright blue, I played the light over her gun hand, no residue on her hand, the residue on the gun was red. I raised her up and scanned the wound on her head, the residue was blue! "Good call Shyn'Staa, this was a cold blooded murder staged to look like a suicide! Who was the last person in here?" I asked. "I was to be! It is how I am to be knowing it was a murder! We were to be planning a hunting trip in the chain mountains on Sixthday." I nodded. "Someone wants to frame you and take out your chain of command in one fell swoop! Likely from Terra side Mafia. Has anyone else left this room?" Shyn'Staa shook her head. "I was being first here when I heard the shot, I was to be locking the area up at once!" I drew my 44... "Then by logic..." I aimed my steel at the closet beside the desk. "The killer is still here!" My supposition was rewarded by three slugs embedding themselves in my armored trench coat, I cranked off a round and jerked the door off the hinges in time to see the perp dropping to his knees holding his guts in, I kicked the gun out of his hand. "Tell me who sent you and I'll see you live!" I hissed at him. "The Krahn family, those cats are costing them a fortune!" he choked as the medical team scooped him up. "As arresting officer, I sentence you to have both legs and your genitals removed and your gut shortened so you'll have to eat a diet of broth and milk every hour or starve to death! likewise you'll leave a trail of shit like the slug you are!" I hissed at him as they carted him away. Shyn'Staa gave me a feral grin. "Your good justice makes me wet under my tail! But married I am being, pity for you, so to be taking double the bounty on a Peacekeeper killer instead!" She purred as she went to her fallen friend's side and stroked her mane. "Pity it being you two never were introduced, to like you she would have." She said sadly. I nodded off at my desk a few moments after I sat down, the last two days had been rough, if not downright stressing! I got to sleep until just past noon when Thuleh buzzed me. "You have an intergalactic call from someone named "Julio" boss, you want it?" she cooed. "JULIO?!" Thank the gods! Patch him in baby!" The line crackled like a cheap radio in a thunder storm for a moment. "Dead Ace smoking!

How are you doing blood?" I heard him laugh. "Me and my partner will be there on Thirdday! Do us a fave and get us an office and set us up a meeting with the local Po-po brass too will you bro?" he laughed. "I'm on that now Jul, meet you at Dome's spaceport then man! you'll love this place, DUDE! I can judge perps and pop them on the spot if needed! Just like the wild west bro!" The phone crackled and farted a moment. "YEEHAH!" Came the reply. "Be seeing you then bro! Be seeing you!" and the line went dead. "I picked up the phone to Shyn'Staa. "I have a surprise for you my Captain, you'll love it!" I heard her sigh a moment. "Please not to be playing games, still missing my friend I am!" OOPS, I had already forgotten the morning's events! "My mentor and his partner are on their way to Ra'Leph, they'll be here Thirdday, if you like my justice, you'll love him! Can you get him set up on Terra side like you did me?" A moment of silence, then a long purr. "TWO detectives to serve good justice? I am to be liking this! She purred. "Three really, his new partner is almost trained as well." A longer purr "THREE? I will to be calling my counterpart on Terra side this hour being! To have him an office ready and waiting I will be! Oh, and the Leon Walkins case is to being concluded, very much illegal substances to being confiscated, very large is your bounty and bonus to be! Come see me tomorrow, yes?" she purred. "Well shit," I mused. "I've been here a week, rescued two damsels in distress, got married, blown away two scumbags and had a part in another getting smoked, and put another in the hospital, and oh by the way I'm getting rich here! I think I'll like Ra'Leph just fine. I think I'll need to get my calling cards printed, a black ace of spades with a hole blown in it.

Two days of blissful boredom, then Thuleh and I went to the spaceport to pick up Julio and his partner Fang, they stood out like a neon sign in a black hole! Julio La Culo [the asshole] wore his typical full length Anaconda skin armored trench and pimp hat with his signature knee high shit stomping boots and pressed khaki cargo pants, he had his pair of 44 Magnums slung low on his hips, held up by an antique silver cowboy belt buckle, Fang was even more conspicuous coming in at seven feet, a female tiger assault trooper dressed in bits of armor that covered her vitals and black titanium chain mail, topped off by a ridiculous looking...[YOU tell her that bright boy!] black leather sun hat and black feather boa, her preferred justice makers were a pair of custom eight gauge automatic shotgun pistols and a Lyrian styled claw dagger, a VERY large one. Julio saw me and ran to me, hugging me warmly. "How many body bags you fill up since you sent me my invite Smoking Ace?" He laughed. "Just three." Said

Thuleh, staring up at Fang. She did not crack a smile. "She serious?" Choked Julio. "I filled one myself." Said Thuleh matter of factly. "A slow week, Two murders, one missing kid, two drug busts, stopped a rape in progress too, My boss beat one of them to death with his Shotgun." She sighed, looking bored. Fang whistled long and hard. "Like stinking New York on a Sunday night huh bro?" She purred. "We are going to get so damned rich here!" After we all were properly introduced we were walking to Peacekeeper prime when we saw three punk teenage kids laying the boots to a trash diver kid, a human, a Tygel and a Lyrian, they were out to hurt him bad! I whipped out my collapsible baton and ran over! "Call a perp truck Thuleh! I yelled as I cracked the Lyrian boy across the thigh, hobbling him, I slammed the heads of the Human and Tygel kid together and shoved them face down on the street, the Terran kid turned on me with a knife in his hand, I introduced his face to the bottom of my boot and he lay still whimpering as I rolled him back over. "Zip these punks Julio and frisk them, time to introduce you and them to judgment on MY damned streets! For the crime of assault with intent to maim, six months hard labor in an adult criminal reform camp, and for the little shit with the shank, six more for assault on a peacekeeper!" I spat. "But he's just a trash diver, we were to just be having some fun!" said the Lyrian boy. I back handed him, splitting his lip! "Make that a year all around, NO PAROLE! S'Kaat's justice is for everyone kid, you will be begging for it when some big, hairy heavy metal miner is bending you over in the shower!" He started to cry. I went to the kid they were Beating up, he had blood all over his face. I pulled out my transcom. "Do you need a doctor?" I asked him. "Not to be mattering, no doctor care, I am garbage diver, I am already dead to them." I lifted his face to mine. "I will make them care! Do you know who I am half cub?" His eyes got huge and he went to his knees with his arms crossed above his head. "Na'Khaan! You are Na'Khaan of the garbage diver people!" That's debatable son, I am JUSTICE come to play in your streets! S'Kaat's justice is for everyone!" I handed the kid a twenty and my card. "You know what I'll reward, come to me if you have it. Tell your friends I need to know who had the Peacekeeper Planetary Field commander killed the other day." He nodded and did the Lyrian gratitude sign as he limped into the shadows. "What the hell was that bro?" growled Julio. "Making friends and influencing people and building my network my man! These street kids know I'm a friend, NOTHING crooked goes on on Lyria side I don't catch wind of as fast as a fart in a flower garden. Making me rich so far." They think you are their messiah." Said Thuleh absently as the perp wagon pulled up

to take the trash away.

The sounds started about half way to Peacekeeper prime “TAP TAP” and “TICKY TICK TICK” sounds from the shadows, like someone tapping on tin cans and dumpsters, Thuleh noted it first. “It’s trash diver code, they’re following us, a LOT of them!” She whispered, placing her hand on her pistol protectively. “Is there going to be a fight?” Rumbled Fang as she moved her coat back for easy access to her shotguns. “Nope, a prayer meeting, I think. Ignore them for now, we’re almost there!” Shyn’Staa was not happy to see us! “A year in adult prison and no bail or parole there being?” I grinned. “Too light? What would you give an adult who damn near beat someone to death just for kicks?” She slammed her hands on the desk! “A gods rotted trash diver!?” She snarled! “Who S’Kaat’s justice protects as much as the Na’Khaan himself!” I said repeating her action. “Then to be going to Sul’Taa and becoming a priest to S’Kaat then!” She hissed. “I should go to Sul’Taa and tell The Na’Khaan he still has children here who need good justice since YOU won’t give it to them! Then we can lock their parents up for child neglect! If I knew there were two sets of rules here, I would have stayed on Terra and played their games with justice!” Shyn’Staa’s eyes shot wide in rage and she drew back to swipe at my eyes when a giant, Black leather fist enclosed her hand and turned her, Her husband H-K Inferno towered over her, he hugged her gently as a child. “You are wrong Shyn’Staa my love, tradition is wrong! S’Kaat’s justice is for everyone! It is good and it is cold, it respects no race or status! Shyn’Staa began to hiss and struggle briefly before going limp in his arms. After a moment she spoke softly. “You are right, I am being a hypocrite and a fool, I do not deserve to represent the justice of S’Kaat! This will change!” Just then a young Sargent burst in! “Madam Constable, we have a situation out front! Best come see!” she said excitedly! Shyn’Staa threw open the window in her office to the street, there below were maybe a thousand trash divers, young and old, male and female, Lyrian and human, all standing silently, all with their hands crossed above their heads. Shyn’Staa looked at me slyly. “Well messiah, speak to your people!” She purred, opening the lock to the fire escape. I stepped out and returned their gesture, they began to chant softly “Na’Khaan...Na’Khaan...” I stepped to the rail and spoke: “PEOPLE OF THE SHADOWS, KNOW JUSTICE, GOOD JUSTICE WALKS AMONG YOU, BUT IT ALSO BURNS IN YOUR HEARTS, I HAVE SEEN IT, I HAVE FELT IT, AND IT HAS COME TO DWELL WITH YOU!” I looked down and saw T’Hoth staring at me, I nodded to her and she turned and told them who spoke no Terran what I had said, the crowd

roared like a hurricane, by that time Thuleh had hooked a bullhorn to a transcom and handed it to me. "RETURN TO YOUR HOMES AND KNOW, YES...KNOW A NEW DAY OF JUSTICE COMES WITH THE DAWN!" And the crowd went nuts. "KNOW THAT AS OF NOW YOU ARE A FAMILY, AND FAMILY DEFENDS ITSELF WHEN IT MUST, NO MORE TO BE OUTCASTS BUT ONE GREAT CLAN AND THE NIGHT BELONGS TO YOU!" Shyn'Staa looked at me in shock! "NOW GO FORTH AND LET THERE BE JUSTICE IN YOUR LIVES AND IN YOUR HEARTS AND LET THE INNOCENT FEAR NO MORE!" The crowd went nuts and dispersed chanting "OUR Na'Khaan walks among us!" "What have you done?" Hissed Shyn'Staa. "I gave them unity, I gave them the strength to demand good justice when it is withheld from them, I let them know that justice burns within us all!" Inferno nodded. "THAT is good justice!" He rumbled. Shyn'Staa tossed her mane in a way that made her look twenty years younger for a moment. "Now that is concluded, Let us meet your friends detective!" she purred. "I feel we shall all to being very busy tomorrow!" Julio looked at Fang. "What the holy hell did we step in coming here?" he said after a moment. "Social revolution, long over due as well. I too feel we shall be very busy come the dawn!" Said inferno, he was not wrong!

Come the dawn, those who had wronged the Shadow people as they called themselves now began to turn up, some tied to lamp posts and left with a crude sign accusing them of a crime, some beaten senseless and stuffed into dumpsters with their crime carved into their foreheads, others beating on the doors of the nearest Peacekeeper station begging to be saved from the "Crazy night people!" It was about that time Ashes came looking for me, he handed me a list of names. "Shadow family to be saying justice for justice, the ones who were to be killing the Peacekeeper hide out here, their names we know are to be written here as well!" I turned to Shyn'Staa. "Here are the murderers of your friend, Tell your husband to rouse his H-K squad, it is good justice time!" She gave me a feral grin as she picked up the phone. Around business hour the H-K black armored vehicles and trucks swarmed into an innocent looking out of town mansion's driveway and the firefight began. it went on for hours, The gangsters inside knew their fate and fought fiercely until suddenly the shooting died away. As the fully body armored "TANK" troopers entered, they found piles of drooling, brain dead gangsters, they each had ingested a fatal dose of brain eater. Henry Krahn's granddaughter stood at the end of the hall, a hypodermic was still sticking out of her throat artery. She was laughing like a maniac! "No

good justice for me kitty cats! Meowwww! I will die a queen!" She giggled. Inferno merely leveled his mini gun/flame thrower at her. "As long as you die... Good justice is for everyone....BITCH!" And with that, turned her into so much burning diced meat. Organized crime in Dome died the death that night, the peacekeepers ruled the daylight hours, and after a few more bodies were found, night time crime dwindled away to nothing, the shadow people defended their own, and if you were out after dark, you asked them nicely for passage! It was at this time, Great Na'Khaan, hearing of the goings on sent money and began free clinics and soup kitchens for the children of the shadows and declared that from then on out, any clan who discards a child would have their holdings and titles stripped from them as well, but T'Hoth who now spoke for the people of the shadows said 'No.' Let them continue, they are OUR family as we would have been yours Great Na'Khaan. OUR Na'Khaan has shown us the way!" He agreed, and once a year a luxury transport comes to Ra'Leph, loaded with the lame, disfigured and retarded who promptly disappear into the alleys and down sewer holes, never to be seen again. It is said there is an entire city of Shadow children out here somewhere, but nobody but me knows where, and I'm not about to tell! It is theirs and theirs alone.

EPILOGUE: A year later.

Ashes and T'hoth led me by the hand down the abandoned subway tunnel, it had been closed off due to lack of actual need in a five mile in diameter city and long forgotten, It was brightly lit by discarded Trilithium fuel rods. They led me to a massive natural cavern some miles away from Dome, it's walls glowed with Tychanite veins and the black Ga'Gnn moss grew in profusion as did many edible mushrooms and small, blind, naked rabbit-like things, the underground rivers teamed with blind flat face fish as well. I was taken to a city built of things the world above had lost or thrown away, here were homes and shops and even a brothel made of old shipping container pods and abandoned drop ships! They took me to a cavern and showed me the treasure of the Shadow people, a mound of raw Tychanite as big as the H-K training academy in Spear of S'Kaat city. "What shall we do with it Shadow Na'Khaan? It being in the way." Said T'Hoth. I pondered long and hard as I beheld a galaxy's ransom in crystal wealth. At last I said:

"Sell it as far away from your home as possible in medium batches, tell any who ask, it came from weeks of sifting, tell them you are but simple sift miners who do well like the Gypsy caravans, gain much wealth and buy what you need until it is gone and you buy back your

place in the sun, and on that day, lift your tails to all who have wronged you, turn your backs and scrape your feet at them. (A very bad Lyrian insult!) as they have done you and live well. It is good justice!" A year later I received a strange package on my doorstep, in it was five million credits, I knew my children were doing quite well!

Planetary chief justice Slang pushed the quartet of golden HK badges across the desk toward us. "At least think it over." He said. Thuleh, Fang, Julio and I looked at one another silently a moment, then we shook our collective heads and I pushed the bright pile of gold back at him. "The minute our people see us in Hunter-Killer uniforms we'll never solve another crime! They'll clam up and never speak to us again! We're doing the best we can right where we're at! Otherwise, we're just some schmucks with guns!" Shyn'Staa beamed from behind him, ears up, eyes bright. She knew her detectives were going nowhere! I could just conscript you, but I see your point, Sha'Zyn has empowered me to offer THIS as well..." And he stacked the badges on top of plain envelopes. "You know you really want to, you're wearing black and have code names already." He chuckled. In the envelopes was a fifty thousand credit advance, a killing license, a permit to carry non regulation arms, a certificate to render judgment, and a permit to do so in street clothes. As one, we pinned the badges to our lapels as Slang grinned. "Welcome to Ra'Leph's first plain clothes justice squad!" He said with a grin. "Here in this envelope is your first case, it's going to be a bitch, there are no clues other than about fifty missing teenagers, all from the outland zone in the Tychanite fields. they're being kidnapped is all we know, the only thing they have in common is unregistered air ship activity in the areas they disappear from just before or right after the fact, we think the perpetrators are using Earth cloaking tech." Sighed Slang. "Impossible is what we eat for lunch boss!" Laughed Fang. I wish I had her enthusiasm! Just then a half grown blue Kay'Hawgh wearing an HK body armor vest trotted in. "Boss! Home basssse sssays they tracked the ghosst ssship almossst two miles before it went out on screenss, Animal and Nun are attempting persssuit!" Slang's eyes lit up! "Good news! Thank you Grinder!" He turned to face us. "IF we're lucky, we'll nail the bastards, but act like we're not, get going!" He said as he left the room on the heels of the Kay'Hawgh.

Back at the office we divided up our tasks, Thuleh would analyze what few flight patterns we had to see if they might point to it's home, Fang would be running a list of who might have a cloaking ship this far out on the frontier and who might have lost one and also who

might have the resources to make their own, Julio and I were leaving on the next freighter headed for Hub, where the last disappearance had occurred. I walked into my office to see if Ashes had finished oiling my gear and cleaning my arsenal. The kid had a knack for guns and small machines in general, when he was a bit older, I'd be sending him to technical school to hone his skills razor sharp! "Might want to have a pro check the firing pin and hammer sear on the Magnum boss, showing some wear in all the Tychanite dust, bolt carrier on the AR 15 is burring a bit too, but I dressed it out and detail cleaned the bolt, you been a bit lazy about that I noticed, the crowd pleaser (riot shotgun) is still in great shape thanks to all the Tychanite chrome plating, but I blew it out and dry lubed the bad mother anyway!" He grinned. I rubbed his head as I checked out his work, not that I distrusted him, but the one time that I did not, something would happen, it was how things went. Seeing everything was perfect as usual, I went to the bedroom and brought out two zipped tactical cases, Ashes eyes got big like when I brought him cheeseburgers. "What you got there boss?" He purred. I unzipped the first. "This is an AR-124 7.62 caliber slug slinger, pretty much the same as the AR-15 but a bigger caliber and built for precision shooting, figured I needed one for Kay'Hawghs when I go outside the city, see the big scope? Back when I was younger, I could make a head shot at three hundred yards!" Ashes eyes were fixated in awe. "And this..Is yours little buddy!" I said as I pulled out the 7.5 hotshot AR. "Pretty much a stocked version of my pistol, but I had the smith put an adjustable stock on it just for you so it will grow with you! I'll be taking you to the Peacekeeper rifle range when I have weekends off! And THIS..." I held up a durachromed 10MM with three extended thirty round magazines. "This is for here at the office, catch is, you can't carry or shoot either of them until I get you cleared on their use and safety! Sometime this month I'm turning you over to A'Suss for some basic training, if she can't teach you to shoot, you can't be taught! Now listen, you are not to even try to put ammo in these things until I say you can, got it? Abuse my one rule and they go back to Ludhkho's gun shop, got it Ashes?" The kid hugged me and purred while his tail went nuts. I rubbed his head again and got ready for my trip. The Ladies Thuleh and Fang did their jobs admirably, we discovered that in each case, the ghost flier had headed inland, to the dune sea, the bleakest, most inhospitable stretch of sand on Ra'Leph, nothing lived there but those deadly millipede like worms, but they only hunted at night, pretty much a death sentence if you slept on the ground as they would swarm you, poison you, and eat you alive!

Fortunately, one bite is enough to kill you in a few minutes. The other danger was the giant moss eating moths, while not hostile, their fur was much like some earth caterpillars, one touch and you were left with agonizing blisters that took weeks to heal, The only cure was to sear the wound with red hot steel! The last danger was the six legged purple lizards, while they would leave you alone and even run from man sized beings, if cornered, they spat acid powerful enough to eat right through an environment suit if not neutralized quickly! There was other nastiness hidden in the sands neither Terran nor Sul'Taa had identified yet, hand sized vampire cockroaches and flesh burrowing worms had been mentioned! Julio and I had brought military grade, armored combat environment suits, at least they were air conditioned. The rest of the sand blasted nightmare was the flora, some of which was carnivorous, covered in toxic spines, caustic sap, or just plain poisonous!

Our trip to Hub was uneventful as it was uncomfortable as economy flight on a Lyrian freighter meant being strapped to a narrow bench for three hours with no in flight service or movie, so most of us brought coolers or portable cryo-boxes full of snacks and drinks, if you got drunk or smoked, nobody cared, and even if they did, nobody cared. My bad luck was to get stuck next to a family of Amass, I may never eat another pickle again! Upon arriving at Hub, we were greeted by Thuleh and Fang, who even though they left an hour after us, bought luxury class tickets and got here thirty minutes before us! Julio and I just looked at each other feeling stupid.

We arrived at Hub's peacekeeper HQ around mid day, it was said their Peacekeepers were loyal only to the city, the fact they wore gray uniforms instead of the traditional teal blue everyone else wore underscored that fact! The bored looking day Constable peered over his sunglasses at us blankly as we identified ourselves, he perked up only slightly and said "I was told to expect plain clothes, the HK must be as stumped as we are to hide themselves." He handed us a fat folder full of clues and evidence. "This is what we got so far, good hunting to you. We have you a suite booked in Ludhkho's hotel, you lucky guys, each room has a hot tub I hear, and imperial size beds! They serve food all day too, Boss says stay as long as you need or like, the city council is paying for it all to show the other cities and Sul'Taa we still play on the same team despite how we do things here!" He chuckled.

The suite was wide open and as big as a three room miner's apartment back at Dome, the two beds were each big enough for all four of us to comfortably sleep, it had a full kitchen, entertainment

area complete with all the hottest interactive vids and games and the hot tub would comfortably seat maybe ten people, Thuleh stuck her nose in the air. "Reminds me of my former master's orgy room, all it needs is red lights, a selection of whips, dildos and slaves to screw." She scowled. "Not bad here!" Purred Fang. "I'm headed to the hot tub! Who's joining me?" Julio and I just stood there mouth open as she stripped on the spot and slid into the bubbling cauldron. "Ay Caramba!" said Julio. Thuleh shrugged and likewise disrobed and slid into the tub. "Remind you of a porn movie old amigo?" I laughed, nudging Julio with my elbow. "When in Rome my man..." He chuckled as he undid his belt. "When in Rome!" I laughed as I likewise stripped and slid into the steamy vessel.

Fang made it a point to prance about the room buck naked once she had dried off enough to "AIR DRY" her fur, she knew both Julio and I were stealing glances at her, I think it turned her on! "This is what we got guys, according to my research there has been a lot of heavy traffic lately, LOTS of it illegal, in materials used to manufacture or repair first generation cloaking tech! I've sent what I found back to Terra prime, maybe they know more than what they've said publicly, I have also found 90% of said outlawed tech was bound for Gin'Jol hid in ore freighters, funny thing. Most of them intercepted were owned by three groups. What's left of the Lyrian Du'Aan council, the remains of the holdings of the corporate families that ran Earth, and the Staal Brotherhood from Dolor! Geez, all we need are Nazis in the mix to make the set complete!" I had to interject, that many of the Corporate families were around in the 40's and supported Hitler! "Noted." She purred. Also, most of what were left were owned by former Tygel ruling families, the brotherhood of Lude!" Thuleh scowled bitterly, but said nothing. "I think we are maybe onto something bigger than we want to be!" Exclaimed Julio! "Maybe better turn it all over to Galactic huh?" Just then, the satphone rang, it was Ashes!

"Get out of there boss, they're gonna nuke you! Hit the streets, we'll find you!" and then he hung up. On the way to the elevator, I hit the fire alarm, and in minutes the street was filled with people wondering what was happening, a Peacekeeper Constable started to speak into a bull horn when a missile streaked over our heads and plowed into the very suite we had occupied only moments before! We ducked into the nearest alley to shelter from the rain of glass and debris and had barely caught our breath when two pairs of furry hands jerked me into an open sewer, I heard Thuleh call my name as I was passed over several heads, deeply into the tunnel blackness, then suddenly, it

was light! The tunnel people had unsheathed cardboard wrapped Trilithium fuel rods. T'Hoth and Shyn'Syn stood before me as about a dozen shadow children swarmed around me from the tunnel, Thuleh, Fang and Julio were right behind them at a run, another explosion shook the ground in the distance as another micro-nuke detonated, I had a gut feeling that one hit the Peacekeeper station! T'Hoth stared at me blankly, her ears in the sorrow position. "Pleased we are being to have been to be able to help our Na'Khaan, but this meeting not to being joyous! To be following us if living you wish to continue to do!" She said. During the mile long trip to the ravine where Hub's sewers drained to, Shyn'Syn explained we were indeed over our heads and that war was coming to the confederation again. T'Hoth told us their network had found evidence that the monsters of ALL our worlds were working together to bring their former subjects to heel! We chanced a look back to the white walled trading city, two ugly, black plumes of smoke trailed into the sky, the air was full of emergency hovers, all singing their song of urgency as I pondered how many had died in the attack. Shyn'Syn gripped my hand gently. "Those poor ones being only the first, in days to come, across all the confederation, much death there shall be! To be attacking all the capitols with a biological weapon which steals the will and to be turning others feral like beasts, then to be blackmailing the confederation with the cure! Out there in the dead place is where they are to be testing and creating it! I was on the Satphone to Planetary chief justice Slang before she had finished speaking. As we left the ravine, the shadow children led us to a small knot of brand new bubble trucks where they donned contemporary desert garb while we loaded up what was left of our luggage. Shyn'Syn handed me the keys to a fine, deep desert armored eight wheeler, inside it was a complete field forensics lab, micro kitchen and sleeping area! "To be meaning to give to you as a gift on the anniversary of you coming to us Shadow Na'Khaan, but to be needing it now we are thinking! To be going now, your investigation at the Trilithium farm needs your attention!" She purred. "How did you know about that?" I asked. She merely grinned as she mounted her white luxury sandwalker.

I talked on the horn to Shyn'Staa, Slang and Sha'Zyn herself for the duration of the trip to the zone, It seems my office in Dome, was likewise treated to a micro-nuke, Ashes was fine, but there were hundreds dead in both Dome and Hub and a radiation hazard that would take weeks to clear, they got the turds that nuked my office, but the cowardly shits had suicide implants that blew their heads off.

Old cat Ludhkho lost his eldest son in Hub and was screeching for blood at the top of his lungs, the new Emperor of earth and Tygel's queens were on their way with their war fleets WITH Na'Khaan's blessing to sort things out on Gin'Jol AND Ra'Leph with extreme prejudice if need be, Likewise the fleets of Amass and Dolor were plodding along at light speed to get to Imperial Earth's jump gates so they could join in the fun, both Dome and Hub were under martial law courtesy of the Hunter Killers of S'Kaat, and a massive exodus from both cities was well under way. Likewise Ra'Leph and Gin'Jol were under quarantine with nothing or no one allowed in or out, Welcome to cluster fuck. One wrong move from ANYBODY and millions would die.

We pulled into the Trilithium farm just past noon, we were met by a distraught Terran man and his Tygellian wife. "Where in hell have you been?" he bawled. "I called Tim in missing two days ago!" Fang snatched him deftly off his feet! "Look Human, some assholes nuked Hub and Dome yesterday, you're lucky we survived to be here, so show us the crime scene, tell us what happened and then shut the hell up!" She snarled in his face before sitting him back down as gently as a feather. "Someone nuked Dome?...Oh, gods!" he mumbled as he led us to some tracks in the pink sand, They terminated in a confused looking circle. "We sent Timmy to get the morning eggs, and when he didn't return we...we found his egg box." The old man wept. Fang sniffed the air a moment, then the circle of prints. "PEE! Whatever it was, it scared the kid so bad he pissed himself!" She rumbled, going to all fours and stalking to a spot just behind the chicken dome. "Piss trail ends here, look at the sand, swirled just like a VTOL took off here, I smell Trilithium oxide and burned petroleum distillates like on a Terran VTOL hover from back in the war, no smoking gun there though, could be war surplus." She mused. "Let's look at your chickens, might be a clue there." I said as we went into the chicken dome, there at our feet lay three catatonic hens, the rest were piled in a heap in one end of the dome, huddled in terror. "That normal for your chickens bub?" I asked him. "I never seen them act like that before! Is it a clue?" He said excitedly. "Might just be, we'll have to do autopsies on these three stoned ones and a couple of healthy ones to be sure, and if not, fried chicken for everybody!" I grinned.

"I'll be damned, they used hyper-sonic weapons!" said fang as she looked through the microscope. "We used to broadcast them at the enemy to set them into a frenzy, just hurt our heads though." She laughed. "I can remember seeing whole flocks of birds just drop dead

right in flight when we turned them on! Fried these chickens minds something good, ruptured their eardrums too. Must have been a tight beam or all of them would be Kentucky-brain-fried chickens! The poor kid is likely alright by now, but when it hit him, he was just like this chicken." Said Fang as she dropped the last one into the deep fryer. Miles away on Gin'Jol Cain scowled bitterly as the jump port flashed again and again as war ships teleported through. "Those bastards are coming to take my world away from me Maul!" He snarled. "This is what I get for tolerating those greedy elitist capitalist fascists in the first place!" The Giant Behemoth Lyrian looked at him with pity. "What can we do no-furred brother? It all being over but the shooting it is to be!" Maul rumbled. Cain scowled bitterly. "Get me a direct line to Na'Khaan, I'm going to cut him a deal he can not refuse!" Said Cain, with a feral grin.

"What do you want warlord Cain?" Rumbled the Great Na'Khaan. "I'm a bit busy these days." He barely looked at the hologram of Cain as he studied morning reports. "I want what you want for once fuzball! You want the Du'AAn and their new world order buddies right?" Na'Khaan perked his ears up!" Cain grinned. "I know exactly where they are and where their bases are on Ra'Leph, got a whole list of their buddies back in Earth space and Tygel, few more on Dolor, interested yet?" Na'Khaan's icy blue gaze cut into Cain's mind like a knife as he focused intently on him. "And what will this cost me War lord?" He hissed. "Cain grinned again. "They're my last competition and cause me no end of trouble, blow the sons of bitches royal asses off my god damn planet and let it be known Gin'Jol is mine alone!" Snarled Cain. "Done deal!" Said Great Na'Khaan without hesitation. "We got to the edge of the dune sea about dark, swarms of Zu'Sass worms were already out and about on evening patrol as were Terr'Sass moths. "Right guys, NOBODY gets out until dawn, not even if this thing catches on fire, that's a swarm of agonizing death out there!" as if to underscore my words, a Terr'Sass moth covered in Zu'Sass worms slammed into the windscreen with a disgusting splat! Thuleh gagged a moment as its insides got smeared by the washer wipers before being scrubbed away. I got Slang on the Satphone to report in. "Get the hell out of there, at dawn the whole place is going to be ground zero! We got word those kids..." He stifled a sob. "Those kids are worse than dead, they used them to test their damn plague on! At least come dawn their suffering will be over, their minds are all damaged beyond repair, they're literally walking dead slaves! That petty tyrant on Gin'Jol spilled the beans to save his own sorry ass, it's literally a doomsday virus! Those that don't lose their sense of

self go full feral and violent! So do a °180 and get your ass as far away from there as possible, because the crack of dawn is the crack of doom for those assholes!"

We were almost two hundred miles away, almost back to hub, when the false dawn lit the world as a deep plasma strike turned the dune sea into a sea of glass, then came the ballistic strike of twenty ton tungsten rods which spewed molten glass miles high, then another, broader, deep plasma strike. The whole area would radiate lethal heat for a decade! It was then Thuleh pointed out Gin'Jol in the sky as similar bright spots exploded across its surface.

We limped into Hub to find most of the mess cleaned up and barrier tape all over the entrance to our former hotel and signs proclaiming radiation hazard in five languages, the streets were mostly deserted. By the time we were signed into the nearest motel, a pair of Lyrian mountain Behemoths in Hub Peacekeeper garb were knocking on our door. Old cat Ludhkho and his partner Tuul wanted to see us!

Old cat Ludhkho met us in a dimmed room, behind him sat the other four members of the city council, He himself sat in a wheel chair, an oxygen mask clamped over his muzzle, his ears lay flat and his golden eyes were blood shot red, he wasted no time in grilling us! "Why..." He rasped. "Why did my son have to die? Why was my city attacked? What harm had they done anyone?!" He hissed, glaring at us! I moved to his side and knelt beside him and took his hand and looked him right in the eyes. "The Du'AAnn council and their spiritual brothers on earth, Tygel and Dolor had a plan to re enslave us all, we accidentally stumbled across it and they moved to silence us, if it helps, we're 90% sure the ones who did it were roasted slowly alive in the dune sea, and if not, we will know it soon, we will gladly bring them to you in living condition to administer justice! But we're pretty sure they're burning in hell." I told him. He gripped my hand tightly and his eyes seemed to brighten. "Ra'Leph being our hell Black ace Detective, but to know they are to be sealed forever in a burning tomb and can never to be returning to the living pleases me. My son can to be returning now that Justice is done, Although my life will be over before he does so and I can not leave to him that which I have to being built, Justice was to being done." He pulled my hand to his cheek and cuddled me briefly. "When this being settled it is being, consider my city your home, you will never being to pay a bill under my care." He sighed. By the time we had gotten back to the motel, Planetary chief justice Slang and Planetary commander Shred were there to greet us in an armored limousine hover... "Great Na'Khaan and the planetary leaders wish to meet you." He said.

The luxury shuttle had us in orbit within the hour and docking with Na'Khaan's personal battle carrier, once the biggest thing in space, Imperial Terra had since fielded several much bigger and deadlier. As we disembarked we were shocked and amazed to see that not only was there an honor guard made of Terran, Tygel, Dolorian, Amass, and Sul'Taa troopers, but Gin'Jol was represented as well! Na'Khaan himself greeted us and led us to a large meeting room to meet the planetary dignitaries. The Tygellian Matriarchs curtsied sweetly wearing silver mesh robes, leaving nothing to the imagination! The Amass brood mother, sitting in an ivory tub of scented oils flared her ear gills to us in respect, The Terran emperor saluted us stiffly in his dull green military uniform, His Felis sapiens queens did likewise, the Dolorian lord likewise greeted us in his manner, and the Gin'Jol warlord, who was too drunk to stand without his giant Lyrian mountain Behemoth toasted us and called out: "Never thought I'd be saying good job to a stinking cop, but way to get stuff done flat foot! Swing by my planet some time, we'll party you up right!" he burped. Na'Khaan and the others looked upon him distastefully a moment before turning their attention to us. "This day, you have been responsible for saving our confederation, each of us owes you favors, ask and you will receive!" said The Na'Khaan quietly.

As for myself, I asked that the children of shadows be given their place in the sun, that the former sex slaves of Tygel have their marks removed for free, That Amass loosen immigration restrictions and that Dolor would allow honey trees to be cultivated elsewhere, and that Gin'Jol keep it's drugs out of the kids hands. "Damned kids go no moneys no way." burped Cain.

Fang asked for a warbreed homeland on Ra'Leph, and that all who want to come be transported for free, that the Amass allow some of their game fish to be seeded on Ra'Leph, that Dolor lower their export fees on their coffee and that Cain keeps his hoods at home, PERIOD. Cain scowled, then nodded.

Thuleh asked that likewise, former sex slaves be given a homeland on Ra'Leph, that child pornography carry a death sentence like on Sul'Taa, that slavery in all its forms be outlawed and sentences for dealing addictive drugs be doubled. Cain scowled again, then threw his hands up and nodded.

Julio just wanted a college of detective and forensic arts on every capitol planet in the confederation. HIS college.

After being publicly honored, pats on the backs and "atta boys" we were let go home, except both our office in Dome and our suite in Hub were radioactive, smoking holes, so Ludhkho put us up in his

personal mansion for a week while we rested up, then. One night as I was whispering sweet nothings into Thuleh's ear and kissing her bald head, who should drop out of the fruit trees but Ashes! He was wearing the clothes of a Terran preteen, absolute height of fashion! I hugged the Lyrian runt like a long lost son! "T'hoth and Shyn'Syn want to see you Boss, Ms. Boss! They got big presents for you guys!" He purred as he led us to the street, there waiting was a limousine hover, inside waiting were our old friends T'Hoht and Shyn'Syn. After a moment of rubbing faces and purring, directed the driver to take us to Hub's spaceport, where we boarded a luxury shuttle to the new city of the Shadowpeople.

It had sprouted seemingly over night on the banks of the inland sea, in reality, it almost had! Thirty foot high walls of gleaming white ceramic that enclosed fifty thousand kilometers of lush woodland divided ever thousand kilometer or so by a three lane road, what I noticed first was there were no buildings! Upon asking, T'Hoht merely grinned and said "And where being people who grew up in sewers and old subways most comfortable being?" She led us to a lone plain brick building and to a stair well going down out of sight. "Even before the Terra war, Terra come here and build this place to study Ra'Leph and Sul'Taa for many years before Dome, it being here they decided to invade! There being a base for maybe ten thousand here, rooms, power, lights, water good and clean! New Earth Emperor to be telling Great Na'Khaan of it when they met last year, here we are to be living, to be bothering no one, and no one bothering us, no more calling us trash divers or throwing things or worse! And to be having many lifetimes of Tychanite from our other home and much more from investing wisely! From now on, all outcasts to be coming here and to be living in peace, learning trades and to be raising families, something forbidden before! In time, our genomes will stabilize and these things we are cursed with will fade away, us being mutations from disease and industrial toxins and radiation from our atomic wars and generations of inbreeding as slaves to the Du'AAn council." She stopped and spat. "In a couple of generations, most to be giving birth to normal cubs, but cubs not like ancestors, normal for US they will to be being! A brand new race, all mixed in with Humans and Tygellians like Great Na'Khaan says, homogeneity it are being! And we are to be brewing much Ga'Gnn to give as the sacred drink we were denied!" She purred. "Ancestors now speak to us as well!" Ashes chirped "To be showing big sister! To be showing boss!" Shyn'Syn pulled me close suddenly! "It being a pity Tygel woman will not share you, to be loving to feed you much of the sacred drink and turn you

into a Lyrman...Such strong and smart cubs we would make together!" She purred with desire! Thuleh's eyes got large in rage for a second, then she took on a sly smile. "Who says I won't share? But no way in seven hells are you turning him into a Lyrman! I do like a good threesome at times however!" She giggled wickedly. Shyn'Syn looked me right in the eye and grinned! "To be doing worse to get what I need sometimes." She purred. I suddenly felt like a prize ham on display at a butcher shop. T'Hoth grinned at me as well..."If that being the case then, My loins have ached for him since the moment he brought my gang cheeseburgers, soul fire being so pretty, so clever a man! Pity being so ugly, but that being hardly anything to complain about, yes sisters?" she purred. Ashes hissed! "To stop talking mush like Earth girls and to be showing boss! All this kissy-kissy to be making me to be sick!" T'Hoth and Shyn'Syn stared daggers at him a second, then took me by the hand. "Follow Shadow Na'Khaan." she purred. We were led to what must have been the commander's apartment, it was lined in polished marble tile and exotic wood paneling and brightly lit by solar proximate lighting, it's lushness reminded me of a Roman spa or a tyrant's throne room, before us sprawled a medium sized swimming pool. "There being ten bedrooms, one master bedroom, full kitchen, video theater and map room and..." Purred T'Hoth. "We drew lots to be seeing who got the honor to serve you Shadow Na'Khaan!" and she clapped her hands and ten, white robed shadow children emerged from the shadows, one of which I recognized as the Lyrian boy I had saved from being beaten, I walked to him and rubbed his head. "How is life these days kid? Better huh" He purred and nodded. "You get a name yet kid?" He dropped his gaze and his ears, but said nothing. "I'll call you Dawnbreaker then, it was with your beating, the dawn of the people of the shadows began! Yours was the straw that broke the cart, you belong in history!" He grinned and rubbed his face on my chest as he hugged me. "To be giving me a new name is to be making me a person again! To being "Limper" no more, but a person! I will to be serving you all of my life I will be great one! And it being my honor to do so!" he purred. I looked around at the others. "Anyone else want a new name?" Eyes lit up and hands went up from my staff, I spent the next two hours naming Shadow children.

"To be considering this your home forever Shadow Na'Khaan!" Purred T'hoth. "Any need you are to be having, we will supply it! When you are tired and need rest, this being all yours!"

Thuleh Sprawled erotically on the five hundred thread count sheets as the last of her clothing hit the floor, I realized that with everything

going on, it had been a while as I took her in my arms. "If they ever make sheets as soft as your skin, I'll never get out of bed again!" I told her as we became one. "So tell me my lush love...are we going back to being detectives and which city?" She shushed me with her finger and pushed my face into her ample bosom. "Me now, business later." She moaned as she got on top of me. I knew that no matter what we decided, she'd be right there with me, I was glad life led me to Ra'Leph and Thuleh!

Cain, Na'Mauul, Ta'Nukk, and S'huun stood atop the presidential tower admiring the fires of the burning cities on the horizon, Cain and his inner circle were now unquestioned masters of Gin'Jol, and so what if he had added a few cities that had nothing to do with the conspiracy, they too stood in his way and having Terra's new boss and that do gooder Na'Khaan wipe them away so he could exploit their resources and bring their surviving citizens under his dominion was thick and gooey icing on his birthday cake! So what if he had to give up selling drugs to the other planets and free his slaves, the extra resources more than made up for it! He could play any game they wanted now he was rich, but until the day he died, every time he heard a whistle or the lightning flashed, he visibly flinched, believing his ruse had been found out and retribution was on its way!

Old cat Ludhkho recovered from his grief and even sired two more sons from his youngest wife and he and Tuul rebuilt Hub and it has continued to grow and spread it's rest stops over the face of Ra'Leph and even into the stars.

Fang and Julio set up their school of practical investigation in spear of S'Kaat, Much to Slang and Sha'Zyn's delight and made a small fortune turning those unable to be Peacekeepers into private investigators and Detectives.

The city of the shadow children has yet to appear on any map, nor will it ever, but once a year the Great Na'Khaan visits with a luxury transport full of "outcasts" to be integrated into their own home, the residents continue to prosper from wise investments of their fortune and the field of Trilithium extractors that has appeared on the nearby plains, and in time, the defects which made them to be outcasts faded and new racial attributes were added, and a tall, slim, golden furred race with big, blue eyes and dark manes stalked the plains at night, and yet the transports come, even though, these days they are mostly empty.

Constable Inferno mutated into a Lyrman and he and Shyn'Staa had a child who one day would inherit their positions and dispense good justice to the city of Dome and beyond, into the surrounding plains.

Ashes bought a failing machine and tool company and began to manufacture a wide variety of combustion powered weaponry and during the great expansion to explore and civilize all of Ra'Leph, his weapons were the great equalizers on the new range and at twenty years of age became the youngest billionaire in Ra'Leph space. Shyn'Syn got her wish and became the detective's second wife and helps T'Hoth run her city with equity and justice as her second in command. And what became of our humble narrator the Detective, who brought social revolution and justice to the Shadow children and united them into a clan of their very own and had no small part of saving the confederation from slavery and horror worse than death? He and his wives and adopted son Ashes returned to Dome and resumed what they knew so well, dispensing the finer points of justice where the peacekeepers failed.