

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the central text.

# **Revelation1**

**Fel**

## Chapter 1

*Kaista, 6 Miraa , 4408, Faey Orthodox Calendar*

*Friday, 24 December 2022 Terran Standard Calendar*

*Kaista, 6 Miraa, year 1333 of the 97<sup>th</sup> Generation, Karinne Historical Reference Calendar*

*Foxwood East, Karsa, Karis*

Well, this Christmas was definitely going to be different.

Sitting on the bench facing his tree as he waited for the kids to finish getting ready to go out, Jason was taking a very short break from all the chaos, chaos that was typical in his house that was amplified by the upcoming holiday. The fact that the pandemic had changed the basic fabric of life on Karis made this Christmas really stand out, like the first real event that had taken place since all this insanity started that was trying to settle things back into the routine. Despite all the work, all the disruption, everyone was trying to go out of their way to make this Christmas special, to use it as an anchor back to the normal life that everyone on the planet was working to bring about. Even those who had never celebrated Christmas before were doing it this year, removing the religious aspect from the holiday and treating it like a day of thanks to their gods and celebration for getting them through the pandemic in one piece, and a hope that things would be back to normal soon. So, this year, *everyone* was buying gifts, and

trees had been put up in households that had never heard of the holiday at all just takirs prior.

Many weren't calling them *Christmas* trees, they were calling them *trees of gratitude* or *trees of wishes*, and they were decorating them not with Christmas ornaments, but with things that were important in their lives, important to them, things for which they were grateful. The Faey were also throwing a tiny bit of their New Year's Day tradition into it, adding little slips of paper holding their written wishes and hopes for the coming year, which they intended to burn from a sanctified candle's flame on Christmas day.

Jason didn't care what they did with the trees, or how they altered their religious traditions to work with Christmas, all he cared about was that the holiday was giving everyone a sincere feeling that the worst was behind them, and that this Christmas was a time to celebrate their good fortune and to welcome, even celebrate, how their lives had changed, and celebrate their hope for the future. And in a way, that was what Christmas was all about... hope. Hope, love, and celebration of family and friends.

And that was no lie. The virus had transitioned the entire population of the planet that wanted it and a large portion of those who hadn't, some 99.6% of the population, that had actually happened a few takirs ago. Everyone had had the chance to get used to the idea of it, get some basic instruction, and settle more and more into their new normal. Incidents of schisms and other telepathic issues had dropped significantly over the last two takirs, as the last of the new transitions had learned how to control their new telepathic ability, and the House had managed to figure out how to train a few *billion* new telepaths with the telepaths that had been so before the pandemic. All the new telepaths were now in classes being held over

Civnet and in person in local education centers, learning how telepathy worked beyond the bare basics they'd already been taught. Songa, Ayuma, and Jerrim had designed a course that would cover the first year of telepathy classes that Faey took in school, which would give their neophyte population a command of the essential basics; the assorted ways of sending, and the basics of defense against telepathic attack. If they wanted to learn more beyond that, they were welcome to sign up for additional courses, which would be offered free of charge through the Academy....at least up to a point. To take the really advanced courses, people were going to have to enroll and pay tuition. Though, tuition wasn't that much at all for a Karinne, especially if they were taking courses over Civnet or on the satellite campuses on the planet.

And just about *everyone* had signed up for those additional courses.

Jason had suspected that once people learned just how useful it was to be a telepath, that they wouldn't just be satisfied with the basics. And in his mind, no one personified that more than Kevin Ball. The man had been tortured by Trillane guards, tormented, demeaned and humiliated, but he wanted to learn everything about telepathy there was to learn. He enjoyed being a telepath, he very much enjoyed it, and he wanted to explore the limits of his formidable abilities. Jason had arranged that through the Academy, giving him a personal tutor, a Grimja telepath that Kreel had recommended, and he was now both taking official Academy classes in telepathy and receiving additional personal instruction from his Grimja tutor, a highly skilled female named Ilki. She had been one of the Union's diplomatic telepaths dispatched to the Imperium to work in their embassy, so she was both very strong and very, very well trained. Her orders were to

teach Kevin everything she knew, to train him so he had full command of his formidable telepathic abilities.

Kevin wasn't the only surprise coming from Terra. Jason had dug a little bit concerning Kevin's Pai friend Mrima, and *holy shit*. He'd had no idea that that unassuming little accountant also happened to be one of the most powerful Pai telekinetics alive, a Pai with immense, almost mind-boggling raw power. The female could pick up a fucking *hovercar* in Terran gravity, *without a gestalt*. But while she had immense power, the Masters had refused to train her because they felt she didn't have the proper mental fortitude and discipline to be trusted with their secrets. Mrima was an example of how selective the Masters were, because she was far stronger than most of the Masters, but they still wouldn't teach her because they weren't sure she would use the skills they'd teach her responsibly.

Mrima was teaching Kevin and his friends Rita and Sano about telekinesis, and Jason felt that was more than good enough. If they wanted to learn more, they could always enroll in TK courses in the Academy, or in Kevin and Rita's cases, petition the Masters for additional training.

Closer to home, Jason had found that the sense of community spurred by the pandemic had not faded. Crime had dropped drastically, people were still almost exceedingly nice to each other, and life on Karis had settled into a very peaceful, harmonious domesticity. The threat of war or chaos from the pandemic had never materialized, particularly on Karis, and the social upheaval that came from the virus had abated. Things were back to normal here, people were back at work, and their quick adaption to the new normal had given Jason a sense of pure relief.

The new normal was truly normal now. Jason was finally used to meeting strangers that could commune—though that really did take a while

—and the planet’s infrastructure had fully adjusted to the dramatic increase in the use of the biogenic network, accepting the larger volume of organic commune. The KMS was on schedule to train its soldiers in sailors in how to use their new abilities in combat, training well beyond what the average Karinne citizen would receive. Things were calming down here on Karis, things were settling into a new normal that Jason found quite pleasing, and things were looking favorable that the calm on Karis was going to spread to other empires that were dealing with the virus.

That was also going very well. The Ten Year Plan was moving along with smooth efficiency. Dahnai was upholding her side of the bargain like a champ, supplying Faey telepaths to the empires that had the virus already on their planets, primarily in the Kirri worlds, Sha’i-ree worlds, and the Union, adding to the native telepath population to train newly transitioned Generations. That was what was happening on planets where the virus had spread during the pandemic. For the others, things were just starting to ramp up. They had sent their initial candidates to the Academy, they had been infected by the virus, and they were being trained in medical isolation as they waited for the virus to die out. Once they were clean of the virus, they’d return to their empires and get ready to train others in facilities that their governments were setting up, including new satellite campuses of the Academy. That was part of the Ten Year Plan, allowing an empire’s own to train their new Generations in their new abilities, demonstrating complete transparency that was needed to establish trust. The rulers would know exactly what their new Generations were being taught, because it was their own doing the teaching, and they’d see every step of the training they received in the Academy before they began training others.

The effects of the Ten Year Plan were affecting Karis as well. Their plan to allow travel to the planet using a nexus bridge was about 15 days from completion. They'd built Nexus Six, which would be at Terra, and Nexus Seven was currently in production. The two nexus stations would allow Miaari and the Kimdori to thoroughly check out everyone coming and going, giving them two chokepoints to ensure that nothing sensitive was stolen from Karis. Both stations would have some massively hardcore sensor systems to scan travelers, and would prevent ships from moving in and out of Karis space that weren't Karinne. That further discouraged any attempt to steal biogenic tech, because they had to disembark from a Karinne transport and pass through multiple checkpoints in both nexus stations before they got on a ship that wasn't controlled by the Karinnes. And given that there was no absolutely no way that anyone could possibly mask, hide, or conceal a biogenic crystal, not even one that was powered down, it would give Miaari more than enough opportunities to catch any attempted theft. The only people that had technology that could affect or influence telepathy were the Karinnes and the Kimdori..

Lorna and Dahnai's prediction that nexus stations may become mainstream just might be realistic. Myleena and Emia had made several improvements and advancements on the infant technology to reduce operating costs and increase efficiency, as well as seriously increase its stability when two nexus stations were linked together. As it stood now, they could keep the two stations linked for about six hours until they had to reset the link before it destabilized, and that was a massive improvement from the two hours that they'd had when they were evacuating the Consortium from Andromeda. Granted, it only took about eight minutes for the two stations to be back up, but that disruption in the flow of traffic during the Consortium evacuation had been a major snag in the flow of

refugees. If they could do it, if they could improve the nexus system so that it could more or less stay up all the time and cut down on the cost of running it, they very well might be able to use them as transportation throughout the galaxy. Expensive transportation, but effective and efficient transportation.

But that was a future problem. Right now, Jason was dealing with the Academy more than anything else. The construction of the dome on Luna was ahead of schedule—the Makati had orders to get that campus built *fucking now*, and they were busting their asses to make it happen—as was the major expansion of existing campuses and construction of new ones, but the problem he was wrestling with at the moment was something that had been proposed to him, something that had him majorly conflicted. Ayuma and Jerrim had approached him with a proposal to build a CBIM for the Academy, exclusively and solely for the Academy, one that would be built purely under the concept that it would be *mobile*. They wanted a CBIM that would manage all the different campuses and act as the repository and archive of all data they produced, and to get around Jason's firm edict that no CBIM would be outside the Karis system, they proposed building a purely mobile CBIM in a space station with jump engines, something big enough to hold its systems, which could be parked in orbit and maintain its connections to the various campuses through biogenic or encrypted tightbeam links. If it was threatened, it could simply jump out. It would have no hardline connections tying it to Terra, its power would be internal, and that would allow the CBIM to simply leave if there was any danger to it.

It could be done. The super-ships they'd captured from the Syndicate and torn apart to learn from them had showed them how to build something



that big, because it would need to be massive to ensure that it had sufficient systems to protect the CBIM from failure and do its job, and also house the propulsion and defense systems that Jason would demand be there to protect the CBIM. They could theoretically build a small super-ship style vessel, much bigger than a space station, which would hold all the biogenic systems, propulsion systems, and defense systems to give the CBIM everything it needed to do its job and protect itself. The CBIM's facility would primarily be a science station by design, an entire massive vessel or facility dominated by biogenic computer server stacks to give the CBIM the ability to manage all the Academy's data, basically making it the most powerful archival computer ever built in known history. It would be the repository of basically all the knowledge of most every spacefaring race in the entire galaxy, and would be in constant contact with *billions* of other facilities both in the Terra system and outside of it, a computer that was built to handle an entire galaxy's worth of data. Because of that, it would need to be the most hardcore CBIM facility ever built, with external stacks out the ass to handle the insane amount of dataflow in and out of the core.

The idea did have potential. Jason's main objection to building a CBIM on Terra was that it put the most sensitive biogenic technology the Karinnes possessed outside of the protection and security of Karis. But the idea of building it in a mobile space station, one that was self-contained, had powerful defenses, and could be moved, alleviated most of Jason's reservations about the idea. He'd asked Siyhaa to do more research into the idea, to give them an idea of just what it would take to build it, how big it would be, and an idea of how much it would cost, both for the station and for the upgrades they'd have to make to connect an orbital CBIM to Terra's comm network to allow them to communicate without messing with the CBIM's datastreams or jacking with Terra's comm or Civnet systems. Jason

could see the advantage of having a CBIM for the Academy, especially when the Luna campus was online, but he also had no intention of removing the computers that were either already there or were being designed. The Moridon were designing a new mainframe for the Luna campus, and he would have that built no matter what he decided, because only the Moridon, the Karinnes, the Kimdori, and the Ruu could design a computer mainframe capable of handling the insane amount of data that flowed through an Academy's campus. And since the Moridon had already designed one Academy computer that had proven itself over the years, Jason was entirely comfortable with them designing the new ones, because they had experience and they knew what they were doing. If he went with an Academy CBIM, it would use the existing Moridon computers as elements of its remote systems. Siyhaa would have no trouble integrating the CBIM with the existing computers, she was the resident expert on integrating biogenic systems with non-biogenic systems.

Bringing Hadjha Siyhaa into 3D and allowing her to take over as their resident expert on biogenic computer technology was one of the smartest things he'd ever done.

Just in case, Jason had alerted the Shimmer Dome that they *might* be growing another CBIM crystal, so they might want to get everything ready if Jason was convinced on the idea and pulled the trigger.

Everything concerning both of the Luna projects was on schedule. The terraforming plan had been fully fleshed out, and it had begun two takirs ago. The first of the major terraforming units were nearly built and ready to be set down, and they'd begin operations as soon as the radiation shield was installed and operational. In fourteen years, Luna would be fully life

sustaining, complete with a 24 hour day cycle and Terra-standard gravity in all population centers, all thanks to Karinne and Confederation technology.

But technology wasn't the only thing in the universe, Jason had come to learn. For the last couple of months, he had been learning from the Parri *shaman*...though *confused to all hell* was probably a better description. He'd had talks like them with her before, mainly immediately after she blinded the Consortium's energy beings, but never in such detail. Most of them had centered around the soul, how the soul could affect the material world, as well as how the soul was both a part of the material world and part of another world, the world behind the real, a world of pure thought, energy, and imagination. Jason's first foray into that mysterious, mystical world was with mirrors, the fact that he could no longer cast a reflection, but his focus was on what that represented. A mirror was no longer a way to look at himself, like everyone else, it was a way to look inside himself, to look into his memories in a way that made him look into them as a spectator, from the outside, which would allow him to see more than he could if he was looking at his memories from the inside. The problem was, he had no real way to control what he saw without training and practice, and that was what the *shaman* had been doing with him since he'd solved the riddle of the mirror—as she put it.

Now, when he looked in a mirror, he didn't really see anything except emptiness. In order to see something, he had to both concentrate on what he wanted to see and not concentrate on anything at all, a trick of meditation where the mind was both focused on a task and not focused on anything, a trick he just could not seem to figure out. When he was in a meditative state, he did see images in the mirror, but he had no control over them. It was like he was looking at dreams that were being put on the glass like an

old fashioned video monitor, seeing memories of the past, memories of dreams, and flights of his imagination that could be best described as the dreams he would be dreaming if he were asleep instead of awake. His mind was layered, the *shaman* told him, layered as it operated in both the world of the material and the world of the spirit, and what he was seeing was his mind and his soul trying to make sense of what was going on over on the other side.

That was the trick of it, she'd told him. To harness his power as a *shaman*, he had to understand the spirit with his physical mind, and teach his soul how to make sense of the physical mind and body in which it was carried. When the soul, the mind, and the body were working together, she would tell him, it would allow him to see truth. And when he understood the truth, it would allow him to use the power of his soul in the physical world.

And the fountain of all power of the soul was love.

There was one thing that his mind, body, and soul had already figured out, which was his ability to talk to others in a way that they would understand, even if they didn't know the words he used. That was something of a natural proclivity, she had told him, something that the three parts of him already understood on an instinctual level. His mind, body, and soul were in harmony when it came to its desire to communicate with other souls, where the purity of his love for others empowered his spoken word and allowed him to speak directly to the hearts of others. It worked best with animals, she had told him, because animals had the purity of a mind not corrupted by the darkness of negative emotion. But while he couldn't speak to intelligent beings the same way he did animals, what intelligent beings heard from him was the purity of his truth, causing them to believe

what he said so long as the words were spoken with love and truth. When he spoke the truth, people believed it was the truth, which was why he garnered such intense loyalty from his people. They believed him, and that allowed them to believe *in* him. So long as he spoke to them from his heart, allowing the light of his love to illuminate the words he spoke, they would know that he spoke the truth.

What surprised him more, though, was how the Parri reacted to Kevin Ball. Three days ago, Kevin was on the planet at Rahne's invitation to do some Christmas shopping, and Jason had invited him and his friends to the strip to let them meet Rahne's family and friends. The *shaman* had asked the oddest question the first time she saw him, asking him what he'd *smelled* when he left his skimmer, and she had known—how he had no idea—that he had some bad scars under his shirt, the physical mementos of how the Trillanes had treated him and the other farm workers. She'd called in another Parri to have those scars removed. When Jason asked, she told him that Kevin was like him and Rann, he had the potential to be a *shaman*. But, what had been done to him had darkened the light of his love and damaged him, which was what the *shaman* had sought to correct when she called in one of her villagers to tend him.

Jason wasn't entirely surprised by that. He knew that the Parri had their eyes on a few other people on Karis, people they knew were sensitive, and Jason was very close to two of them; his son Rann and Kyva Karinne. It seemed a bit of a paradox that the deadliest warrior in the entire Confederation was sensitive to a force that was based on love, but she was...and the Parri said that it was that aspect of her that made her so indescribably deadly. The *shaman* said that sometimes, loveless ones had to

be opposed, and it was pure souls like Kyva that rose up to stand in defense of love against those that sought to extinguish its light.

Jason could believe that. He'd seen her fight, and it seemed *impossible*, the things she could do. Maybe it was, at least for a normal person. It made sense that her insane combat skills may very well be based on a force that wasn't based in the rational world. But, the part of what the *shaman* said that he didn't agree with was that Kyva would not be the Kyva that everyone knew and feared if she was anywhere but Karis. That it was her love and faith in Jason Karinne that made her what she was, and that without him, she would not Kyva Karinne.

He had to call bullshit on that. Kyva had been a holy terror long before she came to Karis, had been known in the mercenary circles as the most deadly rigger in the business. It was why Navii specifically went out of her way to track her down and recruit her into the house, Navii had had her eye on Kyva for a long time.

Navii...he had to sigh. In eight days, she was going to officially retire from the KMS, and he was going to miss her. He would certainly see her again, she only lived four blocks away from him, but he would miss her presence in the command center, he would miss her gentle wisdom and the feeling of security he felt knowing she was there. The entire KMS was going to miss her, and the retirement party they were planning for her was bordering on epic in its scope. Everyone loved Navii, everyone respected her, and everyone, from Myra all the way down to the newest recruit, would feel the emptiness when she left her role as primary military advisor to the command staff.

He'd been after her for years to retire, and she wouldn't do it, didn't feel comfortable leaving until she felt that Karis was going to be safe. And

now that she was finally going to do it, he felt a nearly infantile desire to not let her go, because he would miss her. But, it also told him that maybe things were going to be alright. If she felt that they didn't need her anymore, then maybe the worst of it was behind them. And he could agree with her reasoning. With the galaxy now talking to each other and the Ten Year Plan bringing them closer together, the risk of war decreased with every passing day. She had seen the security plans to protect Karinne territory, and she was satisfied that they would deter anyone from trying to declare war on the house to get biogenic technology. So, she was retiring, finally retiring, and she deserved every credit of the ridiculous pension Jason was going to give her, as well as the honor he was bestowing upon her.

Jason was officially renaming the Dukal Medal of the Champion, the KMS' highest honor, to the Order of Navii, Dukal Champion of the House of Karinne. And the design that all recipients of the medal wore as part of their rank insignia would be changed, a single small eight-sided star placed within the center star of the insignia to honor Navii Karinne. That way her name and her memory were honored so long as the House of Karinne stood. He hadn't told her yet, though, he was saving that for her retirement party. There would not *be* a House of Karinne if it were not for Navii's intelligence, wisdom, and foresight when she built the KMS, her strategic and tactical brilliance when it came to fighting the wars against the Consortium and the Syndicate, and she deserved the honor of having her name associated with the highest honor that the organization she built could bestow upon its members. Navii was and always would be the mother of the KMS, and her children would honor her for so long as the KMS existed. There would certainly be military bases named after her, but this way, the

highest honor in the KMS would always be associated with the woman who created it, and who was one of the main reasons it still existed.

He leaned back a little and watched as a savage drama was about to unfold. Amber had come out of the house to laze about in the sunlight in the back yard, and an invader was lurking just by the corner of the guard barracks. Said invader was Yeri's pet sandracer, which was a fox-like animal from the Kizzik homeworld that were starting to get more popular in the Confederation. Sandracers looked like fennec foxes but without the big ears, with tan coats with a black stripe that ran from the top of their heads down their tails. They were small, energetic, clever, mischievous, and tenacious, and said tenacity was the main source of conflict between the quadrupedal inhabitants of the strip here the last few takirs. Simply put, the sandracer loved to irritate Amber, and Amber felt threatened by a new small, cute animal muscling in on her turf. When she took notice that the sandracer was back, she'd jump up and chase it all the way back across the fence...which was what the sandracer wanted in the first place. It wanted to play, and sandracers were all but born to run, so Amber never failed to supply it with the exact kind of entertainment it was seeking.

But this wasn't a simple game of see and chase. No, the sandracer made a game of just how close it could get to Amber before she took notice of it, with the ultimate objective of getting close enough to pounce on her. So, instead of just charging into the yard yipping to call Amber out, the sandracer was in full stealth mode, lurking by the corner as it scoped out the back yard. When it saw its quarry, it hunkered down like a hunting cat and started slinking forward, stalking up to the flower bed near the barracks that Kaera maintained as a hobby, using them as cover as it moved down to the end of bordered bed. From there it had to cross quite a bit of open yard to



reach some stone edging that lined a walkway that led to the tree, so it got down on its belly and slowly and cautiously started working its way out into the open grass, staying as low as possible and moving slowly so no sudden movement caught Amber's eye. Jason almost had to suppress a chuckle as the sandracer crawled halfway to the edging without incident, then froze when Amber stood up, yawned, took a few steps to the side to keep herself firmly in the sunlight filtering down through the branches of the tree high above, turned a couple of circles, then laid back down, this time with her back to the barracks.

Rookie mistake.

Now that Amber's head was facing the other way, the sandracer sensed victory. It slithered forward much more quickly, but remaining silent, its black eyes slits of dreadful anticipation as it reached the stone edging. It clambered over the edging and got across the walkway silently, and started stalking up towards Jason's bench, intent to use it as a blind so it could get into position to make a final lunge.

But fate was not kind to Yeri's pet that day. The wind shifted, and Amber's ears raised. She then snapped her head up in alarm as the sandracer's scent reached her. The sandracer knew it was busted, so it decided to go for it, surging forward with the sound of shifting grass preceding its attack.

Jason did laugh when Amber managed to get up and squared just before the sandracer could reach her, and the small, sleek animal skidded to a halt, scrambled backwards a few steps, then turned and ran back the way it came with a furious vulpar hot on its tail. The sandracer started to yip in excitement as Amber chased it back to the edge of the barracks, then they both disappeared behind the building.

*[What's so funny, Dad?]* Rann's commune drifted from inside the house.

*[Yeri's sandracer tried to sneak up on Amber. She's chasing it home,]* he replied with vast mirth rippling through his thought. *[Does this mean you two are ready now?]*

*[I am. Shy's being Shy.]*

*[My hair's longer than yours, it takes longer to get it ready to go out!]* Shya protested.

*[Then cut it off,]* Rann returned innocently.

Jason nearly had to wince. *[You want me to WHAT?]* Shya demanded, outrage vibrating through her thought.

*[Someone's sleeping on the sofa tonight,]* Aria mused lightly, which made Jason laugh. His Dreamer daughter padded out of the back door and came over to him, then sat down beside him. She was wearing a rather snazzy cropped top with only half a left sleeve, that left her right shoulder bare and showed off her flat belly, and a pair of knee-length leggings, waiting for Sirri to pick her up so they could go to a Christmas party with some friends from Aria's school. *[Sure you're up to those two today?]* she asked privately, giving him a smile.

*[Like they're any worse than you,]* he retorted as he leaned on his elbows. *[I swear, Sirri is trying to turn you into a courtesan.]*

*[She's calmed down a lot over the last couple of takirs,]* she answered defensively. *[She was just overexcited about getting her freedom back, that's all.]* She glanced slyly at him. *[With us being allowed off planet now, she did offer me a position in court.]*

*[No, no, hell no, and no,]* Jason retorted instantly, which made Aria burst out laughing.

*[Don't you trust me, Dad?]*

*[Do you really want me to answer that question?]* he replied archly.

*[No, because if I got the answer you want, I wouldn't be having any fun at all,]* she replied with an infectious grin.

*[That's it, Sirri is banned from the planet,]* he declared, which made Aria laugh.

*[You kick her out before you give her her Cheetah, and she'll murder you.]*

*[Then she'd better learn to not piss me off,]* Jason told her. *[That girl has gotten way too annoying.]*

*[I'm gonna tell her you said that.]*

*[Go for it, I'm not afraid of a teenage girl,]* he replied pugnaciously, which made her laugh. *[Why am I the only one at the tree?]* he demanded in a commune that swept across the strip, but did not extend a shakra beyond the fence, which demonstrated Jason's skill and control as a telepath.

*[We're almost ready, Dad,]* Zach answered. *[We're still having trouble remembering where we put stuff.]* Three days ago, Zach and Dara moved into their new apartment, which was an attachment built onto Ilia's house. Red Horn had done a pretty good job building them a fairly nice four room, two story miniature townhouse that connected to the side of the house, with a living room and separate kitchen/dining room on the ground floor and a master bedroom suite on the second floor, one room holding their bedroom

and the other a study, both connected to a fairly good sized bathroom. Red Horn didn't have all that much space to work with, but they'd done a fantastic job giving Zach and Dara a good-sized separate apartment that would serve their needs well until they were old enough to move into their own home.

So far, Dara hadn't caused any problems at all. She was already a regular on the strip, so her moving here didn't shake up the power dynamics among the kids. She'd settled into life with Zach quite easily, and Jyslin had gotten her into a development bachi organization in Karsa, one of the kinds of clubs meant for highly talented teenagers who had a real shot at going pro. The club offered tutoring for academics while the players focused on bachi, and Dara had already gone from practice rotations, basically not being on one of the club's six different teams, to a spot on their under-18 third team. From there she'd have to work her way up to first team, and Jason didn't doubt for a second that she would. Dara was an *extremely* talented bachi player.

The Karsa Youth Development Academy was part of the Paladins organization, which Jyslin opened last year to start developing on-planet youth talent. Organizations like it were very common in the Imperium, where a bachi organization might run forty or fifty youth academies on multiple planets to both give young bachi players a place to focus on their game and the organizations a chance to search for prime talent while it was still young and unforged. They were focused completely on bachi, where academics were the bare essentials that would allow the players to pass the required academic tests to progress through grades and ultimately get their primary certificate, the Faey equivalent of a high school diploma. Dara worked long hours, spending most of her time practicing bachi and the

remaining time studying. Zach helped her out as much as he could, which was quite a bit given that he was actually a very smart young man.

Besides, he knew what it was like to have a demand on his time outside school. Because of Zach's exceptionally powerful TK, he had to take more lessons than Jason's other kids. He trained with the Masters every day after school, as the Pai honed and developed his formidable abilities.

Then again, all of Jason's kids took lessons outside of school, but Zach was one of the ones that took even more than the others.

The Pai Masters had told Jason that Zach was *easily* strong enough to be a Master, that he was actually much stronger than most Pai Masters, and that with them getting their hands on him at such a young age, they could make sure he had the mental fortitude and discipline to be taught their most secret techniques. That, he speculated, was why a Pai like Kevin's friend Mrima had been rejected by the Masters but someone like Zach had not. Mrima, he'd learned, had grown up in a small, remote village, and from a young age she'd been constantly told that she was going to be a Master. Jason supposed that being told that so often when she was little made her *expect* it, had inflated her ego to the point where the Masters deemed her unworthy of training, that her village fawning over her had more or less ruined her chances to be accepted by the Masters for training. He knew how demanding they were from the training he'd done with Mrar, and the fact that the Masters would not train quite a few of the original Generations because they didn't think they could handle the responsibility of learning telekinetic techniques that could be deadly if someone that didn't respect that power learned how to use it. Jason considered himself lucky that he was one of just 117 original Generations that the Masters had agreed to train in their advanced techniques.

It took about ten minutes for his older kids to gather by the tree, at least once he started being obnoxious about it, and then they piled into a “minivan” skimmer piloted by Dera, and with Shen, Ryn, and Suri accompanying them, and headed out. Their destination was the Shopping District, a promised last-minute shopping excursion before Christmas that really just got them out of the house long enough for their mothers to get things ready for tomorrow without them underfoot. Once they landed, the kids broke into groups and scattered, and Jason opted to sit in a really nice park beside the landing pad and catch up on some work.

More like just look over other people’s work, but he liked to be in the loop. Simply put, everything was going smoothly at the moment. Out in the universe, the Ten Year Plan’s first phase was on schedule, the Grimja, Sha’i-ree, Moridon, and the Ruu were moving right along with their transition plans to being Generations, the Colonists were about to begin their transition plan, and the Academy projects were on schedule and on budget. Things had settled down here at home to where he was starting to get back to the routine, the routine reports, the routine meetings...and that worried him. Things were going *too* smoothly, it was a bad sign that something major was about to drop on him, and that made him much more alert than normal. He was paying much more attention to the routine reports, looking for anything out of the ordinary, any hint that things might be about to go wrong, and the more he found nothing that confirmed his suspicions, the more convinced he was that his suspicions were correct. That was bordering irrational and he knew it, but he just couldn’t help it. Something was *wrong*, he knew something was wrong, and he just couldn’t find it. And until he did, he’d watch everything.

But, there was some news in his inbox. Holikk had completed transition and had expressed, and was now being trained by one of Dahnai's Imperial Guard. She was extending that courtesy to Holikk, Ethikk, Grayhawk, Magran, Sovial, and Shakizarr, and would probably extend it to others as they decided to join them. Dahnai personally liked those seven rulers, which was why she'd offered it. No new empires had agreed to the Ten Year Plan as of yet, but Zaa had told him that both of the Skaa empires and the Alliance were heavily leaning towards it. That...Dahnai wasn't too thrilled about. The Skaa had always been a major rival for the Faey, and the idea of several *trillion* Generations on the other team didn't sit well with her.

Old rivalries died hard, he supposed.

The tourism on Karis was going much better than he expected. Miaari was keeping a tight watch on all the visitors, and the visitors themselves were doing a very good job behaving themselves.

But there was another major event coming up, one that had been dominating more and more of his time...the wedding. *The* wedding. Shya would be turning 15 next month, and that meant that that the official marriage ceremony between Rann and Shya was going to take place. Because Shya was the daughter of the Empress, she would receive a state wedding, despite the fact that she'd abdicated her title. Dahnai wasn't about to take that away from Shya, take away her special day, give her the chance to stand in a spotlight that was fixed on Sirri the vast majority of the time. So, the wedding was going to be suitably stupendous, as befitting royalty, easily as large and as grand as Maer's ceremony had been.

Though maybe not as momentous. When it came to a son's wedding, the Faey were much more emotionally involved, because Maer was a boy.

Maer's wedding had very nearly stopped the Imperium in its tracks, and was an event that dominated the attention of the entire Imperium. Maer was the darling of the Imperium, even more popular than Sirri, as the male children of the Empress held a very special place in the hearts of most Faey. Faey went gaga over an Imperial Prince the way Terrans went gazoo over the fairy-tale concept of a Princess. Maer was followed much more closely than Sirri, was much more a focus of the press and the lay population, because he was a boy.

And to Maer's credit, he had always handled that attention with incredible maturity and grace, attention that did not dim in the slightest now that he was no longer a Merrane and technically no longer an Imperial Prince. Dahnai could be proud of him over how he had managed the role even now that he was married and out of the house.

But now it was Shya's turn, and she had not entirely been looking forward to it. Shya was truly happy no longer being an Imperial Princess. She had always hated all the attention and the expectations placed on her by her title. Shya had dreamed of being just a normal girl for nearly as long as she had been old enough to understand her role in the family as the *spare to the heir*, and coming to Karis had been her fairy tale "happily ever after" dream come true. Here, she got to be a normal girl, to go to school, to have friends, and not be scrutinized every second of every minute of her entire life. Truth be told, Shya was just gritting her teeth and smiling because she wanted her mother to be happy, and Dahnai wanted Shya to have a full state wedding. Dahnai felt she owed it to Shya, on top of knowing that if she didn't have a state wedding for her, the press would go up in flames over it.

Either way, Jason was ambivalent to it. He was no fan of pomp and circumstance, but he understood the need for it in Faey society. He'd just



play games in his interface during the ceremony and cheat using splitting to keep an eye on the proceedings. That was something he wouldn't have done just five years ago, because he felt that splitting during important meetings was cheating, but years of dealing with the Confederate Council had caused a change in policy. Besides, at the beginning, none of them were all that good at splitting, so they didn't split the way they did now. Fifteen years of constant practice had settled him into the idea that it was okay to split even when things were very serious, as long as one of his splits paid close attention to what was going on.

It was something that was unique to the very few species in the galaxy that could focus their attention on more than one thing at a time, and before the pandemic, was exclusive to the Generations, the Ruu, and the Colonists...all three of which were also well known for the large number of psionics in their populations. The Ruu and the Colonists weren't nearly as adept at it as the Generations, but both of their species were capable of multitasking, the Ruu more than the Colonists, and both only able to do it mentally. Neither were able to perform physical activities in a split state, at least before they became Generations.

That was mainly a moot point now. The Ruu had almost fully transitioned to become Generations, and the Colonies were part of the Accords and thus would begin transition before the empires in the Ten Year Plan, which would begin transition of their population in the next couple of takirs.

The Ruu...sometimes Jason wondered just where they ended and the Karinnes began. The two empires had all but become intertwined since the Ruu joined the Accords, deepening the already extensive connections between the two of them, and the Ruu becoming Generations had all but

sealed the bond between them. There were more Ruu than any other species on Karis since the borders were opened, and what was even more of a surprise, Ruu were starting to apply to the house for official membership. And the very first applicant once Observer A and the Observer Council had authorized it was Scientist PZV, who was formally QBD, and had bequeathed the nickname Alphabet by her peers—Alpha or Alphie for short—on Karis since her designation changed almost on a takirly basis. They'd gotten tired of constantly having to address her by her new designation as she gained rank due to her work on Karis as a consultant, so they bestowed upon her a nickname that both wouldn't change and poked fun at the fact that it her designation did always change..

Jason had plans for her. As soon as Miaari vetted her, she would be the first Ruu invited to join 3D. She had the exact qualities that 3D looked for in their researchers, and that was creativity. She thought outside the box, pushed boundaries, and that was the exact kind of science-oriented open mind that 3D needed. The only thing that kept her out of 3D was the fact that only Karinnes, those sworn to the house, would ever see the ultra-top secret tech that 3D researched. The moment that Miaari declared that Alphabet would keep those secrets from her former Ruu colleagues, she'd be invited to join.

Her joining the House wasn't going to derail her career with the Ruu, either. Part of the new rules the Council was instituting was that Ruu that joined the House would continue to belong to the societies around which Ruu society revolved. Ruu *societies* were their jobs, their careers, and each society had its own ruling council that managed the rank of those under them, and that rank was the entire basis of a Ruu's personal success and standing within Ruu society, both within their job society and as a whole.

The fact that a Ruu's name was literally their rank within their society said everything that need be said about that. Ruu could change jobs, and thus change societies, and could even hold rank in more than once society at a time, much as Alphabet had done in holding rank as both an Instructor and a Scientist. The most common crossover was between the Scientist society, the largest and most prestigious, and the Instructor society, which was only slightly less prestigious due to the great weight the Ruu placed on education. High ranking Scientists like Alphabet (any Ruu with 4 letters or fewer in their rank designation was considered elite in Ruu society) often bounced back and forth between the two jobs, working on the vanguard of research and then teaching other Ruu to disseminate their work. Some societies, however, were restricted. The Observer society, the official politicians and diplomats of the Ruu, was such a closed society. One had to join the Observer society immediately after finishing Academy, and they couldn't belong to another in order to avoid conflicts of interest. Observers could leave, get another job, but if they did so, they could never return. And somewhat of a surprise, the Observer society was considered one of the least prestigious, on par with the worker and customer service societies (the cashiers and clerks), though those that joined it were afforded great honor in Ruu society for "sacrificing" their personal careers for the greater good of the Ruu as a whole. Observers had to be very intelligent to do their jobs, and could have easily joined a much more prestigious society, and thus those that did so were honored for their sacrifice by the Ruu.

The fact that the Ruu were expanding their societies to include Ruu that joined the house was a slightly worrying issue for Jason, that it might divide their loyalty, and he'd had Miaari take that into account when it came time to vet Ruu applicants.

But, what was going on with the Ruu was an omen of what Jason saw happening with the Accords. The Accords empires were getting closer and closer, starting to intertwine together, almost as if they were combining to form one super-empire composed of individual parts. What was going on with the Ruu and the Karinnes was happening with all of them—though the Ruu still distanced themselves from the others due to their strict policies about protecting their technology—and Jason rather liked seeing it. They were family, they were cousins, and it was only proper that they grew closer and closer together. It showed on Karis the most in the massive influx of new applicants to the house from Accords empires, those who had fully embraced being a Generation, who wanted to achieve their maximum potential as Generations and felt that it could only be done if they were Karinnes. Generations like Kevin Ball, who had focused his life on developing and mastering his abilities as a Generation...though Kevin himself had shown no interest in joining the house. But he was a good example of the kind of people that were applying now.

And he'd finally gotten to the point where that idea didn't seem strange to him, that there were Generations that didn't live on Karis.

He liked it. He liked the idea that others got to enjoy the abilities he had had since birth (even if he'd never used them until reforming the house), and it made him appreciate his own abilities even more as he watched others embrace them with such joy and eagerness. He found comfort in the fact that others liked being Generations as much as the original Generations did, and all of them found joy that those who were now family were quite happy with it.

A happy little family with about 126 billion members spread over fourteen empires (he was counting empires that had only a handful of

Generations, like the Verutans, Jirunji, and the Subrians) and 691 star systems, at the last tally. And that number was going to increase geometrically when the Ten Year Plan's second phase was enacted.

And when it was over, when the Ten Year Plan was complete, fully 76% of the galaxy would be Generations, with a population that would be measured in the *quintillions*. And Jason suspected that that number would go even higher when a vaccine was developed and the more speculative and reluctant empires were no longer fearful that the retrovirus would become a plague that would wipe out all life in the Milky Way. Jason foresaw a time when all but the most rabidly xenophobic or traditional empires would be Generations, and those who were not would be a very tiny minority within a galaxy that was united by their common ancestry.

Which was why Jason was already taking steps to make sure that the new Generations didn't develop a sense of superiority over those who were not, the attitude that Sk'Vrae had demonstrated not long after she transitioned. Generations were not better than other people. They were only different, and those differences had to be celebrated, not used as a means to demean others.

He would not let his legacy end the way the original House of Karinne did, one step from becoming tyrants—*monsters*—because they believed that they were better than the rest of the Imperium and had the right to rule over them.

And that ancestry was indeed shared. No matter the race, no matter the species, they were all united by the fact that they were Generations. They were one people, even if some of them had scales or fur, or bony plates. They were a single people, even those who only came up to the ankles of others. They were a single people united by the Kimdori DNA that lurked

within all of them, which let them look upon one another and know that they stood before a cousin.

Family.

And in a weird way, almost all of them were Jason's children. It was his DNA that were the basic components of both strains of the retrovirus that created the new Generations, the foundation of the virus that had transitioned so many. Jason felt a tremendous responsibility to them because of that, because they were directly related to him, as if they were the child of themselves and Jason...and those who were infected by the original strain were also linked to Dahnai, for her DNA had been an element of the original virus. All of them, every one of them, carried elements of Jason DNA within them, forever linking them to him, and him to them, for the rest of recorded history. When the time came that the 1,000<sup>th</sup> Generation was born, the odds were overwhelming that child would be directly of Jason Karinne's line.

In a way, Jason Karinne was the father of an entire lineage of Generations, much as Sora Karinne had been...but Sora Karinne was connected to them as much as she was Jason, for she was the First Generation, the mother of them all. Jason was of her line, and that made all that had been infected by the retroviruses also of her line.

They were all the children of Sora Karinne.

He was honestly surprised when an old friend sat beside him, someone he hadn't seen in quite a while. Molly Fletcher had slimmed down since the last time he saw her, but her hair was noticeably more gray now. She was in her late 50s now, he recalled, but she was still quite a handsome woman. The fact that it was Molly was the only reason the guards didn't flip out

over it. The guards never, *ever*, forgot a face. Jason looked at her, and he could tell that she'd opted in, that she was a Generation. But that didn't change how he greeted her, falling back to his old habit of when she was in Cheyenne Mountain. "Well, look at you!" Jason said in surprise, speaking English, turning to look at her. "How have you been, Molly?"

"I've been fine, Jason, how have you been?" she asked with a smile.

"You don't want me to answer that question," he warned, which made her laugh. "Things have just started to settle down to where I can breathe again."

"I can imagine. It was pretty crazy for us normal people too," she grinned.

"I see you opted in. How has it been?"

"A bit frustrating," she replied. "I haven't expressed yet!"

"Seriously?"

She shook her head. "Ian's been riding me over it for the last month!" she nearly fretted. "He's starting to think I got a bad virus!"

Jason had to laugh. "Just be patient, Molly. Expression isn't something that they can predict. It happens when it happens," he told her. "And you're not the only one who hasn't expressed yet. But you are being a bit stubborn. That's so you," he teased.

She laughed and pushed at his shoulder playfully. "Stop that, you awful man you!" she protested.

"How was it outside of that?"

“Fairly smooth,” she replied. “We avoided being infected by accident, so we were opt-ins. Ian almost demanded I opt in, he said he wanted me to be a telepath like him,” she chuckled. “Now as soon as I express, I can see how the other half lives!”

“We live well, Molly, so hurry up,” he grinned. “You decide to take TK training?”

“The basic courses, and I’ll decide if I want to do more after I finish them,” she answered.

“Smart way to go about it,” he nodded. “Believe me, being able to fetch something off the table without having to get up can be handy.”

“Why I’m doing it,” she agreed lightly. “What brings you out here?”

“Last minute Christmas shopping,” he replied. “The kids are out shopping. I’m sitting here waiting for them to finish.”

“That sounds familiar,” Molly chuckled. “I decided to buy a few more presents for my neighbors this year, because we all certainly feel that we have something to be thankful about.”

“Amen,” he nodded, leaning back on the bench. “At least they had a Terran around to explain what the tree is for,” he chuckled.

“That did take a bit of explanation,” she laughed. “I’m the only Terran that lives on my block.”

“Still live in your land grant house?”

She nodded. “I love that house, Jason, I’m not giving it up,” she replied.

“How’s the restaurant doing?”



“It was rough for a while, due to the quarantine,” she answered. “I would have gone under if it wasn’t for the assistance package from the government. But we’re doing just fine now. Business is better than ever, we’re getting tourist traffic now. I’ve hired four extra employees to handle the increased business,” she said proudly.

Molly really helped pass the time, to where it was the kids waiting for them to wrap up their conversation. He managed to get fully caught up in the world of Molly Fletcher, restaurant owner and one of the original members of the Legion. But she had retired from Legion work after moving to Karis, so no she was exactly what she wanted to be, just another member of the house. Ian had also chosen that route, working a regular job rather than working for 3D, and had a family of his own, making Molly a proud grandmother.

But there was one person there that didn’t know Molly, and he introduced her when Aria joined them. “Aria, this is Molly Fletcher. She’s one of the original members of the Legion,” he said, motioning as he spoke Faey for Aria’s benefit.

“Really? I thought all of them worked for 3D.”

“Not all of us, dove,” Molly smiled. “There’s a good number of us that gave up the heroics after we came to Karis. I’m quite happy running my restaurant, I’ll leave all of the galaxy-saving adventures to the youngsters,” she smiled.

“Pft, don’t let Misses Modest here fool you, Aria. She was absolutely pivotal in our victory over the Trillanes,” Jason boasted. “She just likes to keep a low profile, that’s all. It’s her thing.”

Molly laughed. “Stop that, Jason, I didn’t do much more than run the kitchen in Cheyenne Mountain,” she said diffidently.

“You kept all of us organized. And when the Trillanes captured me, you were the one that kept everyone from doing anything stupid. You don’t think that was pivotal? We’d have been lost without you,” he countered with a smile. “Hell, we would have all *died* if it wasn’t for you.”

She blushed, looking away from him.

“But, seems the kidlets are done, and no doubt I’m keeping you from your own shopping,” he said, standing up. “Call me every once in a while, you silly woman,” he chided.

She laughed. “I *do*!”

“Not nearly often enough,” he told her. “Now let me get the kidlet pack back home so they can make a mess out of the house.”

*Raira, 10 Demaa , 4408, Faey Orthodox Calendar*

*Thursday, 27 January 2023, Terran Standard Calendar*

*Raira, 10 Demaa, year 1333 of the 97<sup>th</sup> Generation, Karinne  
Historical Reference Calendar*

*Foxwood East, Karsa, Karis*

*[This is getting RIDICULOUS! Move it, you two!] Jason’s savage  
commune ripped through the house. [We are going to be late!]*

Jason would have thought that given how many years they'd been planning this, that his kids would have been ready for the day they were going to leave. It was three days until the wedding, and certain Faey religious obligations and some secular requirements meant that they were about to leave for Draconis. They were going to be staying in the Imperial Palace for those three days, and then on the fourth, they would have the wedding in the Basilica, which was the was the only church to Trelle that was not an abbey, and was the largest and most grand of the various religious buildings on Draconis. It was on the other end of a street that was named the Garland, with the palace at one end and the cathedral on the other, a symbol of the connection between the crown and the church. There were three such streets radiating out from the palace, named the Garland, the Necklace, and the Sword, ending at the Basilica, the First Cathedral of Aris, and the High Temple of Demir respectively. State weddings were always held at the Basilica, but it would be officiated over by representatives of all three gods. Rann and Shya would be married in the traditions of all three sects. The First Templar of Trelle, the High Priestess of Aris, and the Archprelate of Demir would conduct the ceremony, with each one marrying them by the traditions of their individual church. That was effectively three marriage ceremonies performed sequentially, but that was how a state wedding was done.

The entire day would be steeped in ceremony. They would begin the day at sunrise with a very special meal, and after eating, Rann and Shya would take special baths meant to symbolize their ritual cleansing, so they would marry at the height of physical and religious purity. While in the baths, they would get haircuts and otherwise primed and prepared for the ceremony, and would emerge from the baths dressed in their wedding robes and ready to go. They would then immediately go to the Basilica and wait

until the ceremony began, which would take place at 1700, two hours after noon. The ceremony would last nearly three hours, and would begin at noon. Afterwards, the wedding party would travel to the First Garden for a special ceremony only conducted for the Imperial family and outside of the eyes of the cameras, a ceremony only attended by the Imperial Family, of which Rann would become part upon his marriage to Shya. That ceremony would still take place despite both Rann and Shya not belonging to Dahnai's house, it was purely based on bloodlines. Shya was the daughter of the Empress, so that ceremony would be held. Rann had to attend because he was her husband, but no one else would be allowed to attend, not even the guards. Only Dahnai, Maer, Sirri, Shya, Miyai, Raisha, Kaen, Rann, and the High Templar of Trelle were allowed to attend, and that was *it*. Not even Jason and Jyslin would be allowed to attend that ceremony. Not even *Kellin* was allowed to attend, and he was Dahnai's husband, though he'd been there during his marriage ceremony.

The Faey religion believed that the First Garden was the place that the Faey race was created by Trelle, where the First Ones Baa and Baaen were created...which smacked heavily of Adam and Eve from the Christian bible. But the Faey believed that the small, meticulously maintained park and garden on the grounds of the Basilica was their literal Garden of Eden, the place where Trelle made Baa, and then Demir made Baaen once Baa entreated Trelle for a companion so she wouldn't be lonely.

Jason often found it interesting that the Faey believed that in the beginning, there was no such thing as a male. That there were only females. The male gender was created by Trelle in the form of Demir, when then populated the world with males that were formed from his blood. It was

actually a pretty interesting creation myth, one of the more fascinating ones among the many religions in the galaxy.

It was also interesting to Jason that the name of the First One, Baa, was also the Faey word for *god*. He wasn't sure how that meaning changed over time, or if it was some kind of significance to it...was she named after god, in the image of god, or did her name change over time to reflect her divine origins? It was even more interesting to him that the entire Faey calendar was based on their gods. The names of the months were words that honored Trelle, because in their original forms, they ended with *-baa*, which was contracted over time to the suffix *-aa*. The first five days of the week honored Aris, using her original name Arist, originally written as *-istaa*, which literally meant *Arist the god*, which was what the *-aa* ending meant; it was a suffix that meant *of god*. The last five honored Demir, *-miraa*, which had been contracted to *-ira* over time. Today was Raira, but in Old Faey, it would have been written Ramiraa, which meant *the day Ra of the god Demir*, but over thousands of years it had change to Raira. The first day of the week, Raista, would have been written Raistaa, and meant *the day Ra of the goddess Arist*.

Most Faey had no idea that their religion was so pervasive through nearly every element of their language, and thus through their daily lives.

Then again, most Americans probably had no idea that the days of the Terran week were all named for gods as well, mainly Norse and Roman gods. Today was Thursday in the Terran calendar, a day named in honor of the Norse god Thor. Its original meaning was Thor's Day, but over time had become Thursday. The only other day of the week that hadn't significantly changed from the name of the original god from which its name originated

to where it was now virtually unrecognizable was Saturday, named for the Roman god Saturn.

Some of the Western months were also named after gods, January, March, May, and June, named for Janus, Mars, Maia, and Juno respectively. Two were named for important festivals in Roman culture, February and April, two were named for Roman Emperors, July and August, and last four months of the year were literally just Roman numbers, September through December, the numbers seven through ten in the Roman number system. The original Roman calendar also had numbered names for the fifth and sixth months, Quintilus and Sextilus, but those names were changed to July and August. Originally, the Roman calendar only had ten months based on the lunar cycle, which was why the numbered month names didn't match what number of month it was in the modern calendar. Two months had been added to what became the Julian calendar, January and February, which were originally added to be the first and last months of the year respectively...back then, February was the last month and January the first. When the Romans reformed their calendar in the 8<sup>th</sup> century to try to make it much less messy (the Julian calendar added an entire leap *month* into the calendar every four years to try to balance the calendar against the planet's orbital year), the names of the months had their order changed (February was originally the last month of the year, but became the second month when the calendar was altered), and some months had the number of days in them changed to even things out..

When the calendar was altered by the Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by order of Pope Gregory, creating the Gregorian calendar that most nations on Terra used, the names of the months weren't changed, which brought them into the modern era.

Take that, religious fundamentalists. Every time they spoke the word of a day of the week, or certain months of the year, they were actually invoking the name of what they would consider to be a false god.

After the visit to Trelle's Garden, they would ride in an open carriage—but under a hard shield—along a parade route that would take them past the First Cathedral of Aris and the High Temple of Demir. That parade would last nearly two hours, given that the carriage would be moving at a slow walk, they would return to the palace for a grand feast held in the throne room. Once the feast was over, Shya and Rann would retire to their bedchamber to consummate the marriage. And they were *expected* to consummate the marriage, as in tomorrow morning an official declaration would be made by Dahnai that Shya had indeed slept with her husband.

Which was pointless, since they'd done that already. As Jason expected, the very first time Rann had an erection, Shya pounced and relieved both of them of their virginity. And it made him feel old to think that his son was *that* age.

Rann finally appeared at the bottom of the stairs, carrying a small bag holding his important stuff in one hand and with Amber cradled in the other. By the door, Uma and Mai waited, part of a large retinue of 39 guards that would be going with them on this trip. Only seven would be remaining behind, six guards and a shift commander, tasked to defend the strip until they returned. Hara was the shift commander staying behind, commanding two guards from each shift that would protect the strip in pairs over three shifts. Uma and Mai were wearing brand new Crusader armor, only days off the assembly line, armor that now held tactical gestalts. All of the guards had been certified to use them, so every guard now had tactical gestalt armor.

He would be supplying similar tactical armor to every member of the Imperial Guard. Then, he trusted with biogenics. The guards on Karis, his detachment and the detachment that guarded the summer palace, just got them first. He'd already worked out a training schedule with the Colonel where guards would come to Karis, get trained on using a tactical, then receive their tactical armor once they were certified. That training program was scheduled to begin when they got back from the wedding.

The guards were certified on all of the gestalts except a CBIM now, which made them exceptionally formidable, given they could access the "big boy" gestalt built under the main house, a heavy hitter gestalt that was usually kept off, and was only activated in emergency situations to give them considerable power if it was needed. That gestalt now had an access list as part of the gestalt revamp after the pandemic, and the guards were on the list in case they needed to use it to defend the strip. Outside of the guards, only Jason, Jyslin, Myleena, Yana, Temika, Jenn, and Vella had access to that gestalt. That gestalt was so powerful that only those who had special training to use a top-level static gestalt and lived within physical proximity merge range were allowed access to it. Yana and Temika, the two most powerful non-Generation telepaths on the strip before the pandemic, had undergone training to be able to use that gestalt, so they were on the access list. The other residents of the strip with sufficient security clearance would be added as they completed the training.

*[About time, sheesh,] he chided as Jyslin came down behind them.  
[We're all waiting for you.]*

*[Sorry, Dad. We couldn't find Shy's travel case.]*

*[You were supposed to pack that yesterday!]*



*[We thought we did,]* he retorted.

*[I did pack it, but it wasn't where I put it when I double-checked the bags,]* Shya elaborated. *[One of us must have taken it out and forgotten to put it back.]*

*[I swear, it's like you two have become completely scatterbrained before the ceremony,]* Jason teased as Uma opened the door. *[Now go get on the transport, we're running behind.]*

His tardy children hustled out the door, heading for the water dock. A military MT-101 passenger transport was hovering just over the water's surface at the end of the dock, a staircase extended down onto the dock. That was one of the fancier transports used to ferry large groups of high-ranking officers around, and had room in it for 96 passengers. Every seat inside was going to be filled, because the entire strip was going to the wedding. Given how many kids they all had, it was no surprise that the transport would be half filled just by strip residents alone. The remaining seats were going to high-ranking members of the government and some of the original Generations. Jason was able to invite 260 people to fill his block of seats in the Basilica, and he handed those invitations out to cabinet members, high-ranking government officials, flag officers, some interested members of 3D, and a few personal friends. Krirara and Mrar had been invited, and both were going, but they were already aboard the *Tianne*, which was the ship taking them all to Draconis. Jason followed them out, carrying his own carry-on, with the guards following behind him. *[I think that's everyone, Aya,]* he called ahead. *[Everyone ready to go on the ship?]*

*[We've been ready, Jason. Just waiting for the bridal party.]*

*[We said we were sorry!]* Shya barked in annoyance.

*[Palla, we're about to take off,]* he called over the network, reaching out to the ship in high orbit, so its mass didn't affect the planet. *[You ready to go?]*

*[We'll be ready as soon as you arrive, Jason,]* she answered. *[All other guests are on board, you're the last group.]*

*[The wolves aboard too?]* he asked. He'd invited the pack to the wedding, and they'd accepted. They were quite curious to see what a mating ceremony would be like for their bipedal neighbors...and the wolves would certainly shake things up a tiny bit. He rather doubted that the *Siann* would be expecting five giant wolf-like animals to be official guests, or that they were just as intelligent as the other guests.

*[They arrived first. I had time to give them a tour of the ship while we were waiting.]*

*[Make sure you grind that in Rann's face, he's the reason we're late,]* he noted, which made Palla return pure amusement.

The trip up was smooth and without incident, and they landed in the starboard main landing bay, the ship coming to a rest beside two others that looked just like it. Those were how they were getting down to Dracora, and those three ships would hold all of them. He greeted Palla and the alpha pair of wolves as he came down the stairs, kissing Palla on the cheek and then nearly getting knocked over by the alpha female as she greeted him. *[I'm glad to see you too,]* he said with an audible laugh, pushing back against her massive paws. *[You guys excited to see how silly we bipeds can be with our ceremonies?]*

*[There's nothing wrong with ceremony, Jason,]* the female told him impishly. *[I've wanted to visit Dahnai's home for a while. I rather like her.]*

*[It's suitably stupendous and silly, which is a reflection of the Faey mindset,]* he replied blandly, which earned him a slap from Palla. Both wolves communed pure mirth. *[Where are the cubs?]*

*[Still roaming around the ship,]* the male answered. *[You know how curious they are.]*

*[Oh yeah,]* Jason had to agree lightly. *[This is the first time they've been on the ship and could open the doors on their own.]*

*[This ship. It was a cruiser that brought us back home after we trained on Karis,]* the female added. *[So the cubs are curious to see how a big ship like this is different from a smaller one.]*

*[Very, and I hope they enjoy finding that out on their own,]* Jason replied as the others filed past them.

Jason spent most of the trip chatting with Palla and Coma's bionoid up on the bridge as the ship turned away from Karis, then cruised at sublight towards the Stargate that led to Draconis. The ship was joined by a massive task force as it moved, including being escorted by all three of the other fleet flagships, until nearly a quarter of the KMS was assembled in a grand formation of *thousands* of ships by the time they reached the Stargate. It was a sendoff by the KMS to Rann and Shya, showing them their love and respect.

The *Tianne* passed through the gate first, and after waiting for the 39 ships that were part of its deployed task force, the ship cruised at sublight to its planned orbital position well away from Draconis. INS line vessels joined the fleet flagship as it traveled, until a huge fleet of several hundred ships came to a stop. The line vessels arrayed themselves in rows to each side of the bow, an honor guard, and thousands of Wolf, Raptor, Titan, and

Valkyrie mecha filled the sky around the ship. Jason returned to the landing bay to see friends and family boarding the transport, but he was there long enough to see a trio of Valkyrie mecha come through the airskin and land by the bow of the transport. The lead mecha was Sirri, in her Karinne modified personal Valkyrie, which was a biogenic unit carrying a tactical gestalt. The other two Valkyrie riggers were members of the Imperial Guard.

*[Hey little sister!] she called brightly from inside her mecha. She was PIM. I'm ready to escort you back to the palace! You ready for all the craziness?]*

*[Ready to get it overwith!] she replied. [But I'm very happy you're gonna be leading the procession, sister.]*

*[We'll give the people a good show,]* she communed lightly. She pulled the wing-like lattices built into the back of a Valkyrie out of the way enough to grab the hilt of a gigantic two-handed sword and pulled it over her shoulder. It was made to resemble the Sword of Demir, and Jason realized that it would almost be like the *real* Tianne would be escorting Shya to Draconis. Tianne was the only person that was allowed to wield her father's sword, so there was some very deep meaning in Sirri having that sword made for this ceremony, given she'd be launching from a ship that bore the name of the mythical figure that wielded that sword.

Those constructs may look like wings, but they were actually weapons. At the end of each spar attached to the wing-like structure was a weapon, and they could be moved and aimed in any direction. Sirri's Valkyrie had three different weapons staggered through the spars, carrying four pulse weapons, four MPACs, and two of them were equipped with Korgg heavy tetryon wave cannons, which were the most deadly weapon imaginable if

she engaged another mecha in hand to hand combat. At close range, there was nothing more destructive than a heavy Korgg wave weapon.

They weren't only about the weapons. Each spar also held a small but fairly strong grav engine pod, and those pods gave the mecha some stupid maneuverability and acceleration in both vector-based and atmospheric operations. Valkyries didn't need flight pods because of those wing constructs.

Jason had long truly admired just how the engineers had designed those wing constructs. They didn't interfere with the mecha's range of motion, they were very flexible and would even let the mecha roll on the ground without breaking them or fouling the mecha up, and they gave the mecha some *insane* firepower without tying up its hands. And most of all to the Faey, they were beautiful and made the mecha look majestic; aesthetics were *extremely* important to the Faey. It was a testament to the fact that the Karinnes didn't always have the best ideas, that true innovation and genius could come from anywhere, and in this case, it came from the Imperium. The Faey were actually *damn good* engineers, and they had a knack for designing highly effective mecha units.

It was why the Karinnes were making their own version of the Valkyrie, they were outstanding mecha that were well designed, and once they were upgraded with Karinne tech, they were just as good as Titans...in some respects, they were better. Valkyries were faster and more agile than a Titan, but Titans had the upper hand on them when it came to durability, versatility with their pod mount system, and raw firepower. It said a lot that the KBB had started operating with both mechas when they deployed, some using Valkyries and some Titans to give them an optimal mix of speed and power.

Kyva used both. Half the time she deployed in a Titan, the other half in a Valkyrie, and her choice was based on the mission parameters. For pure dogfighting, or for mecha to mecha combat in skirmish situations, while only the KBB was deployed, she preferred a Valkyrie. But for strike missions against fixed targets or large operations where they'd be deploying with other companies and were expecting heavy fighting, she preferred a Titan.

They were on the way after a few more minutes. Shya and Rann were up in the cockpit, standing behind Aya and Shen as they piloted the ship, looking in awe out of the front window. Sirri and the guards were leading the transport out from the task force, and they were joined by hundreds of mecha from both the KMS and INS. The line vessels fired their weapons in low power mode as the ship passed, creating brilliant lines and pulses and streaks of lights, like a fireworks display as the transport made its way to Draconis. The entire thing was being broadcast over several news networks and *Courtwatch*, letting everyone see Shya and her groom arrive on Draconis in preparation for the ceremony in three days.

This was the kind of grand ceremony that entailed a state wedding in the Imperium, and it wasn't going to get any less flashy or gaudy from here.

The INS put on a great show as they approached the planet, then the majority of their escort broke away as they executed a controlled descent into the atmosphere. Sirri continued to lead them down, carrying her replica of Demir's Sword as they came down through the clouds and flew over the city of Dracora, the procession lining up and approaching the palace. They landed on the largest pad, in the back of the compound, where Dahnai, Kellin, Maer and his wife, Saelle and Evin, Miyai and Raisha, Saelle's daughter Laeri, Jinaami, and Kemaari waited. Kemaari was doing a

temporary stint in Jinaami's office for further advanced training, getting to see how Jinaami planned out the Kimdori's side of the wedding's security, but was due back on Karis next month. Dahnai was holding Kaen, who was growing like a weed, fussing a little bit at being held and wanting to be put down so he could run around. The toddler was in his "I just learned how to run so I have to run" stage, and he was a bundle of endless energy that always wanted to move, to range out, to explore. He was a fearless little boy.

Luckily for Jason, the twins were coming up on four now, so they were able to move around with only a little gentle guidance, but they were still carried down the steps due to how high they were as Shya and Rann led the procession disembarking from the transport to meet Dahnai. She leaned down and hugged Shya, then put her hands on her daughter's shoulders and looked down at her. "You're getting so big!" she said. Despite the virus, it was still tradition for the Empress to speak, and Dahnai wasn't changing it.

"You just saw me two takirs ago, Mom, sheesh," Shya replied, which made Dahnai laugh.

"It's more than that, you silly girl. You're about to have your state wedding. That means for all intents and purposes, you'll be an adult in the eyes of the *Siann*," she told her with a smile. "That's three of my babies all grown up. It makes me feel old."

"You're not old, Mom," Maer assured her.

Sirri joined them after dismounting her mecha, standing beside Aria as she held her helmet in the crook of her arm. "We've got your rooms all prepared," Dahnai told them, setting Kaen down. He ran over to Jon and Julia almost immediately, and the three toddlers started drifting away from

the group. The toddlers of the other strip residents followed suit, until the guards swooped in and started herding them towards the house.

“I think the kids have the right idea. Let’s go inside,” Dahnai declared.

Sirri took Aria’s hand and started pulling her towards the palace, no doubt already planning their shenanigans for the next three days, and the others followed them. They were led to their private apartments, which were permanent in Jason, Jyslin, Tim, and Symone’s cases. Dahnai had given them their own private apartments, permanent apartments, which were just down the hall from the Royal apartments and shared some of the amenities that were connected with Dahnai’s living space. The three apartments all shared Dahnai’s private courtyard and garden, as well as the swimming pool that she’d had built to try to imitate what she had in the summer palace. Dahnai’s new favorite place to hang out in her apartment in the palace was the pool deck of her private pool. The fourth side of the courtyard held a guard post, where those guarding Dahnai’s person or her apartment kept some of their equipment.

Dahnai’s relatively newfound love of swimming pools, developed from the pool at the summer palace, had shown in other parts of the palace. There was now a very large “public” pool in the back, enclosed in a permanent hard shield that was kept in invisible mode so it gave those using the pool the illusion that they weren’t in a giant box. Dahnai’s new habit was to hold one or two courts a takir out at the public pool, much the way she held unofficial court on the pool deck at the summer palace, which made things seem much less formal, more relaxed, and as such Dahnai managed to get a lot of work done during them. Dahnai was very intelligent, very cunning, and she had seen how the Grimja’s mixing of business and pleasure expedited the conclusion of business by putting everyone at ease, and she



had started imitating that tactic. That was how things were done among both the Grimja and the Sha'i-ree, and it worked fairly well for, or maybe *on*, the Faey too.

When Jason and Jyslin settled in and went out to the courtyard, he was not surprised at all to see that they weren't the only guests Dahnai considered enough of her inner circle to invite to her private pool. Kreel and Enva were already there, Kreel sitting at a table with a tankard in his hand, wearing only his beloved Bermuda shorts, and Enva sitting on the edge of the pool, leaning back on her hands and kicking her feet idly in the water as her tail swished behind her. It was no surprise, Dahnai was very good friends with Enva, and was also good enough friends with Kreel to let him into her private areas, since she spent so much time with him on Karis when she was visiting Jason.

It also made sense that they waited here. Only those directly connected to the Imperial family met Rann and Shya when they landed, and as much as Dahnai may like Kreel and Enva, they weren't part of the family. Tim wasted little time hurrying over to Enva and sitting beside her, continuing his hunt for this particularly elusive prey—Enva led him on but wouldn't succumb to his advances purely for the entertainment of making him chase her—and Jason sat down beside Kreel as he drained his tankard and raised a hand towards one of Dahnai's attending servants, calling for another one.

*[Drinking up all Dahnai's Makati ale already, eh?]* Jason teased.

*[Sure as hell trying,]* he grinned in reply. *[We saw that ridiculously overdone arrival on viddy.]*

*[You know how the Faey love showing off. Sometimes I think they're just really tall Prakarikai,]* Jason communed with a wicked barb in his

thought, one that was designed to incite a reaction.

And incite one it did. *[You're not necessary for this wedding, buster. You wanna be packed off back to Karis like a misbehaving child?]* Dahnai threatened from her apartment, which made both Kreel and Jason laugh.

*[That's his objective here, silly,]* Kreel called, exposing his dastardly plan. *[The best way to get out of all this stuffy nonsense is to get thrown out of the pub before it gets started.]*

*[Don't tell her that, you're screwing up all my plans!]* Jason protested.

*[She already knows what you're up to, but she's gonna fall for it anyway because she's Faey,]* Kreel winked. *[They're hopelessly predictable.]*

*[Don't you start too, Kreel, or I'll lock you in your room and have the holoemitters do nothing but show picture after picture of Makati brewers making their ale,]* she threatened. *[You're in my palace, buster, the guards do what I say.]*

“Straight for the jugular,” Jason laughed, speaking Grimja.

“She’s always been a meanie,” Kreel grinned toothily at him.

“Then stop baiting her,” Enva purred, speaking fluent Grimja herself..

“But that’s what’s fun!” he protested. “It’s only fun if it’s dangerous!”

“I swear, are the males of *every* species completely hopeless?” Enva teased, looking over at them.

“That sounds like jealousy to me, Enva,” Kreel retorted.

“I’ll hear no such nonsense from two untailed dweebs,” she said airily, which made Jyslin laugh.

“Oh yeah, forgot that Sha’i-ree think that having an extra limb makes them better than everyone else,” Kreel grinned.

“Semvu gave us women our tails so we would be complete, and left men incomplete to remind us that they are ephemeral, temporary. That’s why all the rest of you are empty, always searching for something you can never have,” she taunted, swishing her tufted tail behind her ostentatiously..

“And Enva heads to the mound, calling for her racial superiority pitcher almost right off the bat,” Jason teased. “In the first inning, no less! I think this error may cost her the game, Mike,” he said, looking over at Kreel. “She’ll have no good relievers left by the seventh inning.”

Kreel grinned. “Rightly so, Don. Let’s go to the instant replay and see this disaster in slow motion!”

“What are you two about?” she demanded as Tim erupted into laughter, looking over at them.

“Don and Mike are a couple of sports play by play guys on Karis’ baseball network,” Tim told her. “They call all the Karsa Bombers games. They’re hilarious.”

“You don’t watch baseball with us enough to get the joke,” Kreel told her as Dahnai came out of her apartment, delightfully nude. With her was Rann and Shya, who would be staying in the guest bedroom in Dahnai’s apartment up to the wedding, then they’d be staying in an apartment of their own from their wedding night on.

*[The strip girls and their kids on the way?]* she asked one of her guards.

*[They'll be along as soon as they finish settling in, your Majesty,]* she answered. *[They already know where to go.]*

*[Good. Make sure there are plenty of refreshments for everyone, it's gonna get crowded in here.]*

Sirri and Aria arrived through the public entrance to the courtyard, through the guard post, ready for the pool by being nude as well. *[Gonna be a crazy three days, little sis, you ready for it?]* she asked again, coming over and taking Shya's hands.

*[We'll manage,]* she replied, smiling up at her older sister. Sirri and Shya had managed to retain a powerful bond despite living on different planets. Then again, Sirri was on Karis so much, it wasn't all that hard for them. *[I loved that you led the procession, big sister. It made me happy.]*

*[I enjoyed it. You only get married once, ya know,]* she replied. *[I just got that Valkyrie last takir, so it was my first chance to show it off. Isn't it awesome?]*

*[Another new one?]*

*[Yeah, they pulled my combat computer and put it in the new Mark II Valkyrie, they said they couldn't get mine off the refit line fast enough to use it in the ceremony. So, they just gave me a new one,]* she replied. *[I was just gonna use my INS Valkyrie, but the guards shot that down. They said I needed a mecha with a tactical since I'd be so visible.]*

*[I swear, girl, you're gonna run out of room for all your mecha before you're twenty,]* Jason accused, which made her laugh.

*[Big toys are the best toys,]* she replied shamelessly, looking in Jason's direction. *[That Valkyrie has a tactical and pulse weapons in it, so it's pretty nasty. I love it,]* she purred mentally.

*[Stop talking about that crap in my house, girl,]* Dahnai warned. *[That's what you do on Karis, not here.]*

*[Doesn't understand a word of it, eh?]* Shya asked Sirri with a sly smile.

*[Nope, Mom's hopeless,]* she replied. Everyone laughed when Dahnai advanced and smacked Sirri smartly on her bare butt.

*[Hey now, no assaulting the Royal person, Mom!]* Sirri protested with a smile.

*[I'm the Empress, little missy, I can smack you all day every day if I want to,]* she retorted strongly, then looked to Jason. *[And Mark II? You're already producing a different Valkyrie mecha?]*

*[Yeah, but the changes aren't all that big. They're just big enough for us to classify it as a different version of the mecha,]* he answered. *[It's mainly for maintenance. Mark II units use a few different parts, so when they go to order replacement parts, we have to make it clear which type of part the ground crew needs.]*

*[What's different about them?]* Dahnai pressed.

*[A new power plant that adds about 15% more available power and upgrades to the joint servo units,]* Sirri answered before he could. *[The Mark II units have a new type of joint actuation servo in them that makes them move a little faster and more fluidly. I like them way better than the Mark Is.]*

*[We're upgrading all our other macro mecha with the same system. It's an import from the Cheetahs, they found a way to use the servos we designed for the Cheetah's leg systems and port them into the other mecha. The new servos are smaller, faster, allow for much more refined control by the rigger, and they're more rugged, making them harder to break or be damaged in combat.]*

*[I noticed, it's like my new Valkyrie moves as smoothly as my Cheetah does, and I have even more fine control when I'm doing something that takes a very precise touch,]* Sirri nodded. *[They putting them in the smaller mecha?]*

*[When they figure out a way to miniaturize the servos so they'll fit,]* Jason nodded. *[I've got both MRDD and ASM on it. We need to, if we can get them to where we can put those servos in the hand units of a macro mecha, it'll give them some serious precise control. I'm talking being able to move their fingers by millitikras.]*

*[I said enough talk about that kind of stuff!]* Dahnai protested.

*[You started it,]* Jason shot back.

*[So we can get all that boring talk out of the way quickly,]* Colonel Mari called from the guard post. *[We need to discuss the training plan with you, Jason, as well as the gestalts and other equipment you're going to issue to the Guard.]*

*[We can have a meeting about it in the morning, Colonel,]* he answered her. *[Have Saelle and the twins been doing a good job teaching your girls?]*

*[Yes they have, thank you for sending them,]* she replied. *[The twins are very good teachers.]*

*[Hey, what about me?]* Saelle protested. Her apartment was just down the hall from Dahnai's, which kept Kaen and the girls very close to her.

*[You already know that we're quite satisfied with your training, Saelle,]* Mari replied easily. *[Stop being so insecure.]*

That made Jason erupt into laughter. "Now I see where Aya gets her attitude from," he said aloud, giving Aya a sly look.

*[She is my mentor, Jason,]* Aya replied tightly, so Saelle wouldn't hear her.

"Well, this visit's gonna be entertaining," Tim said sagely, which made Jason laugh. The fact that he said it while sliding his hand up and down Enva's leg, and she let him, accented his observation.

She was just playing with him. He knew it, but he couldn't resist doing it. He knew that she let him get his feels because she enjoyed the attention, but she wasn't giving him what he really wanted because it meant he'd stop giving her the attention she enjoyed. And yet he couldn't help it, showing how hopeless Tim really was.

Enva could be vicious, but then again, she *was* a politician.

But, Tim was right. Something told Jason that this visit was going to be remarkable, and it being Shya's wedding would have nothing to do with it. It was the first major social event in the Confederation since the Ten Year Plan was put into place, so in a way, it was a celebration of returning to a sense of normalcy, much as Christmas had been on Terra and on Karis.

Yes, these next three days on Draconis were going to be exciting, and he felt in good ways. Much as he wasn't looking forward to all the stuffy

ceremonies concerning the wedding, he *was* looking forward to seeing how things played out over the next few days.

It was going to be quite entertaining.