

Death of the Immortals

By Jo Dinage

On the planet Segaan, we get a glimpse of the planet's tumultuous history. One civilization was wiped out and the rulers of another were facing certain extinction—until the experiments. Zooric is now paying the price of the experiment that went terribly wrong. With his abilities and skills, he was born to rule, but for Zooric that is not an option. The abuse of his past is still too vivid a memory. To survive he must escape. It is then he discovers the secret his people have been hiding for centuries. There is another race living on the planet! They are the Tifoosas. They are the aliens, the invaders... but to them Zooric is alien. Yet he has pledged to support them in their ongoing war with their ruling council. To win the war he has to face his past; he needs the help of his people. To win the war the Tifoosas need him, but they also fear him and his extraordinary powers. Now into this already murky mix comes an explosive attraction between Zooric and Carrie, the daughter of a Tifoosas.

Copyright Information

Petrovian Publishing
P.O. Box 13
Shrub Oak NY 10588
petrovian@yahoo.com

The author does not guarantee and assumes no responsibility on the accuracy of any websites, links or other contacts contained in this book.

Death of the Immortals

All rights reserved.

Petrovian Publishing/ published by arrangement with the author

PRINTING HISTORY

Petrovian Publishing / September 2017

Copyright © 2017 by Jo Dinage

No part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including scanning, photocopying, recording, taping or by any information storage retrieval system without the written permission of the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. Please do not encourage piracy or plagerization of copyrighted material in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

For purchase information contact:

Petrovian Publishing
petrovian@yahoo.com

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thanks for the support from my family and friends

Table of Contents

Copyright Information
ACKNOWLEDGMENT
Table of Contents
Prologue: Segaan
300 Alifees/Years Later
Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Arapmo
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20
Chapter 21
Chapter 22
Chapter 23
Chapter 24
Chapter 25
Chapter 26
Chapter 27
Chapter 28
About the Author

Prologue: Segaan

The Jirga Kaiser watched with narrowed, yellow eyes as Zha Obeel cautiously approached him. Rule had been thrust upon the Jirga suddenly, with the unexpected accidental deaths of his first brother and his father. Having eliminated just about every disease known, an Azar was virtually an immortal and could technically live forever, barring accidents. A crushing injury to the torso, or depriving the brain of oxygen—as in a drowning—were some of the few unavoidable causes of death among the Azars, which was why the death of two royals in a transporting accident 400 cycles ago had stunned the nation. The current Jirga had assumed rule in the midst of the present crisis, and unfortunately, the deference due a Jirga was seriously undermined because he was viewed as a young, brash second son with a ferocious temper. He now waited in silence, impatient with Zha Obeel's slow approach.

Beside Zha Obeel walked, Loya Favood, the most powerful psychic of Segaan. At the required twenty paces, Zha Obeel stopped and prostrated himself on the floor. Loya Favood stood silently next to him. The psychic's eyes were closed in concentration. His robe and hood covered his form from head to toe leaving only the pale blue of his face and hands visible. As a tenth-degree psychic, and leader of the psychics, he only could remain upright in the presence of the Jirga.

<"Eighty full cycles ago Loya Favood made contact with the aliens. He has disabled their outside communication system and the controls of their flying machine. They were forced to land on Segaan and cannot leave."> Zha Obeel voice was monotonous as he raised his head.

His mental words reached all, including the Jirga, who grunted in assent.

Zha Obeel continued mentally. <"We have captured some of the aliens and Loya Favood been studying them carefully.">

Slowly the Jirga extended his hands from his robe to touch the pads of all four fingers with each other. Within the last 100 cycles his skin had taken on a translucent hue. Although a reversible process, it was a sure sign of stress among the Azars. And the Jirga was under a great deal of stress. As imperial ruler his responsibilities would have

been enormous. With the turmoil of the past forty alifees, the Jirga, and indeed the entire nation, were now at risk. Unfortunately, the stress had not only caused his translucent skin, it had also drastically worsened his notoriously short temper.

Nevertheless, the Jirga Kaiser was determined to find a solution—hence this new experiment. He now waited in silence, impatient with Zha Obeel’s slow approach.

Although he had requested this meeting, he was unsure how it would develop. Normally, this, his central receiving chamber would be bustling with advisors. This cycle, however, the hall had been cleared. Even the guards had been banished to the other side of the closed doors. The Jirga had allowed only four of his most senior advisors to be present. They were standing silently behind him and would remain silent unless he requested otherwise.

Zha Obeel continued his advance. His head was bowed as was customary. Zha Obeel was neither a minister nor an advisor within the imperial government. He worked as a Blocker for the Psychics. The Azar’s system of government had two branches: the Jirga and the Psychics. And although the Jirga was the ultimate ruler of all Segaan, in the history of the Azars, none had ever dared to ignore the powers of the Psychics. Within the Psychic chambers Zha Obeel’s position was undoubtedly revered. The imperial rule however, consistently refused to grant Blockers the almost mystical privileges reserved for the Psychics. Here in the Jirga’s chambers Zha Obeel was regarded as an ordinary citizen.

The psychic’s eyes were closed in concentration. His robe and hood covered his form from head to toe leaving only the pale blue of his face and hands visible. As a tenth-degree psychic, and leader of the psychics, he only could remain upright in the presence of the Jirga.

<“Eighty full cycles ago Loya Favood made contact with the aliens. He has disabled their outside communication system and the controls of their flying machine. They were forced to land on Segaan and cannot leave.”> Zha Obeel chanted as he raised his head.

His mental words reached all, including the Jirga, who grunted in assent.

Zha Obeel continued mentally. <“We have captured some of the aliens and Loya Favood has been studying them carefully.”>

<“My advisors say that you have brought twenty-one of the females and one male into the sector. What have you learned so far?”> The mental question was addressed to the psychic standing silently in front of him. But again, it was Zha Obeel who answered. A psychic could communicate only through his blocker and even then communication was mental. Without a blocker, communication with others was often difficult, many times impossible. There were recorded incidents in history of psychics dying from mental jamming in attempts to communicate directly. The psychic needed the blocker as a shield to filter the mental static of others, especially a high-level psychic such as Loya Favood.

<“Contact is dangerous, but Loya Favood believes we are compatible.”>

<“Believes?”>

<“Loya Favood wishes more time, Jirgaar.”>

<“We have no more time,”> the Jirga roared. <“So inform Loya Favood. Have him send an image of these beings.”>

<“Loya Favood wishes to study the beings more before....”>

But the Jirga interrupted harshly. <“An image!”>

<“It is as you wish, Jirgaar.”>

The same fuzzy image began to form in the minds of all present. It slowly took shape, showing three aliens. They were naked and unconscious, lying on a smooth surfaced, table like structure, in a sterile-looking chamber. All were female.

<“These are the first females we captured and the ones we are studying. The others are in a conscious state and kept in separate chambers.”>

The Jirga’s face remained expressionless, as he stared at the females. Unlike the Azars, the skin color of these beings was pinkish yellow—a skin color unknown to the Azars. Stranger yet was the hair that seemed to cover their entire body. The Azars did not have body hair. But worse was the thick, shoulder-length, yellow-brown hair on two of the females and the flowing black hair on the other. Lower

animal life forms were the only living things on Segaan to have such a quantity of hair concentrated at any one area.

Despite his shock, the Jirga's voice was neutral as he asked. <“What of the males?”>

<“We have only captured one male. The others were accidentally killed on the Upside. He is being kept in a separate chamber.”>

<“Is he like the females?”> the Jirga demanded.

Although his face was still expressionless, a certain tension had crept into his voice. It was enough to make Zha Obeel blink rapidly—a sure indication of nervousness. And two of the advisors actually shifted in disquiet.

Despite the general unease, nothing prepared them for the next image. He was undoubtedly male, and he too was naked. But he seemed totally unconcerned about his nudity as he stood shouting at someone unseen. Despite the fact that he was caged, his savage expression and furious grip on the bars of his cage caused even Zha Obeel to gasp in shock.

The Jirga gave the mental equivalent of a growl. <“They look nothing like us.”> Now his voice reverberated in growing anger. <“The Loya Favood said these beings were as we are.”>

Certainly, the male was even stranger than the females. Although tall, he was still not nearly as tall as the average Azar, and his skin color was a dark brown with eyes that were either dark brown or black. Like the females, short yet clearly visible hair covered his entire body, noticeably thicker on his head and in his groin area. But the hair on his head looked different. It was tightly curled, sitting like a cap on his head. The Jirga's growing anger and revulsion were hardly surprising. Azar's eye colors were all varying shades of yellow making the black color of this being's eyes seem even more shocking. And none in Segaan had ever seen anyone without the blue skin of their own people. Add these differences to the body and head hair—phenomena unknown to the Azars—and the result was total abhorrence mixed with fear. All present had also noted the absolute fury on the face of the male.

<“Outside appearances will not matter if we are compatible,”> Zha Obeel rushed to explain. <“Loya Favood thinks they

have the appearance of our early ancestors. It may be that they are in a primitive stage of their development. Loya Favood is still investigating their biology. It is most difficult. He cannot see their insides clearly.”>

Unfortunately, the Jirga’s disgust had hardened. <“Already the Loya Favood has spent eighty cycles examining them. What more time does he need?”>

<“Perhaps twenty or more cycles. Loya Favood needs to confirm....”>

<“We do not have twenty cycles to waste. It was the plan of the Loya Favood that we use genetic material from the female aliens. Surely he has already tried this? We need to know the results of his experiments!”>

<“Loya Favood begs more time Jirgaar. It is critical....”>

<“Enough! The Loya Favood can continue his examination of the beings already captured. We need not bring any more Downside. How many more are there?”>

<“Loya Favood has touched 153 females and 215 males, Jirgaar.”>

<“Tell the Loya Favood to send a pulse to destroy them all.”>

<“A pulse is not possible Jirgaar. Touching the alien mind is proving extremely dangerous. This first-cycle the mental contact killed one psychic.”>

<“Very well. We will send a small party Upside. We can wait no longer.”>

After a brief pause, Zha Obeel, still prostrate on the floor, lowered his head in obeisance. <“Loya Favood will submit to your wishes Jirgaar. However, let it be known that only one psychic will accompany the Upside party. Segaan cannot afford to lose another psychic.”>

The Jirga grunted. As the Jirga Kaiser, he was determined to find a way to save the Azar race. After over eight thousand alifees of civilization, the Azars would not all die—not while he was Jirga Kaiser. He would do whatever it took to save his people, which was why he had reluctantly agreed with his council when Loya Favood first made his proposal.

However, now that he had seen the strange beings, he did not think this plan would work. The aliens looked repugnant. He did not wish children from these beings populating his world. To change course he would need to eliminate Loya Favood. That would be difficult if not impossible. There was no other psychic powerful enough to challenge the Loya Favood—assuming he could even find a psychic willing to oppose their own leadership. A better alternative would be to pretend to go along with policy of the Loya Favood. Perhaps he would spare the females for a while and let Loya Favood continue with his experiments. The male, he would have killed immediately. That too would be difficult to arrange, but it was feasible. It was certainly not necessary to have any live alien males on the planet. Besides, even the Loya Favood admitted that they were a danger. He did not want even a remote chance that any would survive. And without males the aliens would not be able to reproduce.

With an abrupt mental command he dismissed Loya and his Blocker, <“Go! I will allow you more cycles to study the aliens you have captured. But the ones on the Upside will be destroyed. Also, we must have an alternative option. This I will think more on. Our survival is in the will of Tooal.”>

300 Alifees/Years Later

Chapter 1

“Perhaps we should have taken more boys?”

“No. Only fifteen boys were born from the experiment. Taking more than five would be too risky.”

“The Soosan would never know.”

“The current Jirga does not track the boys, but the previous one did. If this one lives...”

Zooric couldn't pinpoint exactly when he began making sense of the sounds he was hearing. There were two men in the room and they were discussing him. He struggled to open his eyes but the lids felt unbelievable heavy. Drugged again! He did not even have the energy to

summon his past rage. He wanted to give up. Could he will himself to death? Even as the thought surfaced he realized—I am thinking! In his past drugged state he had been unable to put two thoughts together.

“He’s coming awake.”

That voice! Zooric became absolutely still but he knew he would never be able to fool them. He could already hear his frantic heart beat—in his head.

“Zooric!” One of the men tapped him lightly on the face.

He tried to turn his head but his muscles seemed disconnected from his brain; he was not sure how much movement he actually achieved and not even to save his life could he open his eyes. An involuntary groan escaped, startling him. Was he in pain?

“What do you think?” It was the same voice.

Suddenly, Zooric felt a burning pain in his upper chest. Again he groaned and helplessly tried shifting his head, but fortunately, he truly was unable to move his upper body. What were they doing to him?

“He is not really responding.” This was the other man. Zooric feared them both but this man, Deeknor, was a monster.

“Dees! I thought you were going to kill him.”

“With a knife? Deeknor laughed. “That would be too messy. And how would we explain his death from a knife wound? Apply some pressure. I do not want his blood dripping on the floor.”

“His brain is probably fried.”

“He definitely cannot move,” Deeknor sounded satisfied. “No one could remain still while being stabbed.”

“So what do we do now?”

“We will keep him here for a few more cycles. He is waking up. The other boy never regained consciousness although he lingered for four cycles. If this boy wakes, even if his brain is gone, we will use him until he reaches puberty.”

Zooric’s breathing was labored as the pain slowly faded. Only vaguely was he aware of a pressure on his chest. They did not want him bleeding to death. They would still use him. He did not care anymore. He slipped back into unconsciousness even as despair filled him.

It was dark when he woke again. He knew because he shocked himself by actually opening his eyes. He tried to lift his head but the

effort was beyond him. As he relaxed on the bed, he was jubilant as he realized that he was aware—his brain was working again—he could think. He was naked, lying under a thin sheet covering; he could turn his head but he couldn't lift his arms and he was not sure his legs were actually attached to his body. If this was the effect of a drug it was something new. He searched his mind—trying to recall anything of his past—and a fierce joy filled him as his memory came in bits and pieces. It wasn't much but he could now remember his family. This definitely meant he was no longer under the influence of the mind numbing drugs. With a sigh of relief he closed his eyes and drifted off.

When he woke again there was light, and the sounds of a quarrel.

“Onke Deeknor sent you to change him.”

“I changed him last cycle. It is your turn.”

“It is not my turn. And you did not change him. You always get Raekon to do your dirty work. I brought him his food. Onke Deeknor said we were to take turns...”

Restric and Shron were two of the boys living in the house. Both were Zooric's age, not harmless, but not an immediate threat so he ignored them as he again took stock. Since he was feeling stronger, he cautiously tried moving his arms and legs. Yes, he was definitely recovering. Now that he had some control over his muscles he would have to hide that fact from them. How long had he been unconscious? It had to be at least one cycle for certain, but perhaps two. Each cycle was 25 eens but a cycle was broken into first-light, which was five eens, followed by three eens of first-dark. The cycle continued with second-light, which generally lasted eight eens, and then nine eens of second-dark. It was light now but he was not sure if were first or second light.

Since the boys were still busy arguing, he carefully turned his head to look around the room. This was not the room he normally shared with the other boys. Was he even in the same house? In his regular room there were no windows and he and the other boys slept on pallets on the floor. This room had a large window and, in addition to the bed, a closet completely covered one wall. From this vantage

point, he could not recognize any landmarks. In fact, he could see only the green Segaan sky. It was also impossible to tell how secure the window was. However, if he was in the same house, he could be in one of the rooms that he had never been allowed to enter. Before he was drugged Restric had told him about those rooms, and he knew that they had unsecured windows. He was afraid to hope, but now that he could think rationally he had to plan. This could be his only chance to escape.

He was brought back to the present by the slamming of the door. Restric had walked out. He was never changed but at least Shron fed him, and later that cycle the boy Restric came back with another liquid meal.

“You stink,” Restric sounded pleased.

Whose fault was that? Zooric thought surly. However, he deliberately gave no indication that he understood. He now knew it was second-light. And he was in the same house. He hadn’t dared leave the bed, but he had been able to raise himself enough to take a peek out the window. He recognized some of the landmarks. Also, throughout the cycle he had been regularly exercising his muscles, carefully hiding his actions whenever anyone entered the room. His bed was wet with urine because no one had come to assist him from it and he was not about to let them know that he could speak, or move. A wet bed he considered minor. He had learned that he could live with discomfort, beside, after an entire cycle he could no longer smell himself. He now waited in silence for what he knew would be minimal help at best, torture at worse. It was Restric’s specialty.

Shron had propped him up with pillows to feed him the thin liquid with a spoon. Fortunately, he was still in the same propped up position as Restric brought a full bowl to his mouth.

“Here! Eat! Do not expect me to feed you.”

Zooric kept his expression blank. He dared not move. Predictably, since he was unable to swallow fast enough, most of the liquid poured down his chin and onto the sheet. It was steaming hot and Zooric was unable to stop a hiss of pain. As he gasped, even more of the hot liquid poured over him. Zooric’s breathing was hard, his eyes wide and staring as he struggled to blank his mind—to control the pain. His

biggest struggle was controlling the urge to move or push the bowl away.

Restric began giggling. “Poor Zooric. It is a pity you cannot understand.”

The bowel emptied. Zooric slowly unclenched his fists that were fortunately hidden by the covers.

Restric grinned at him. “If you are lucky Shron will clean you.” Restric continued grinning as he pulled away the covers, exposing Zooric’s naked body to the cool air. “You need air to dry and perhaps get rid of the smell.” He was turning to go when the door opened.

Deeknor entered.

“How is he?”

“I tried feeding him but he does not swallow. Look at the mess he made.” It was said with exactly the right amount of indignant concern.

Deeknor came over to the bed. “Why was he not changed?” he demanded.

“You were not here Onke Deeknor, when I begged Shron for help and he refused. I tried but could not turn him by myself. I was just now about to replace the sheet he soiled as I tried to feed him.”

“Shron refused to help?” Deeknor’s eyes narrowed.

Restric tentatively reached out to touch Deeknor’s arm “I even threatened him. I told him I would tell you of his refusal but he said he would accuse me of lying.”

Deeknor patted Restric’s hand reassuringly. “I will take care of Shron. Go find him. Tell him to go to my room immediately. I will be there shortly.”

Zooric did not have time to feel pity for Shron. As Restric left the room Deeknor bent over the bed.

“This is probably for the best.”

He forced himself to stare blankly as Deeknor removed a knife from his belt. Zooric eyes tracked the knife as Deeknor absently tapped the blade against his open palm. This is it, he thought. Yet his heart was not even racing. He was in fact feeling unnaturally calm.

The other man entered. “I have been checking on him throughout the cycle. He is fully awake but he still does not move.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive! I checked him with my knife.”

He had done no such thing but Zooric was not about to argue the point. The boys had been his only visitors this past cycle.

Deeknor straighten. “It is senseless to keep him alive if he cannot even feed himself.”

“We will be left with only three boys,” he said nervously.

“That means you will have to be very careful. We cannot afford to lose another boy.” Somehow his words seemed to carry a threat, perhaps to the other man, yet Zooric gave an involuntary shiver. Fortunately, the men were no longer focused on him.

“I have heard that the sizzle can have a numbing effect on muscles. It has been only two cycles. Perhaps we should wait at least one more.”

“Perhaps, but I never intended him to live much longer. We could not keep him drugged forever. Besides, now that the boys from the experiment are approaching puberty, the Soosan Protectors may begin making enquires. We could give them a dead boy but there is no way to explain how a boy could get sizzled.”

The other man was nodding. “You are right. How...”

“A blow to the head. That worked before.”

Zooric’s eyes flickered. He could not believe he was listening to a discussion of his own death. And such an emotionless discussion! Deeknor could have been discussing the weather.

“I have to travel outside of Caleel within a cycle.” The monster continued. “I will take him then.”

“We told the parents of the other boy that their son ran away. What will we say for this one?”

“He did not like the strict disciplined training that a Soosan must follow. He fell out of the window when trying to run away. They are poor. It is unlikely that they will question us if we pay them well. Also, like before, I will give them the body.”

They continued talking as they left the room. Zooric was now shaking so badly his teeth were chattering. It was not only from the cool air. His emotional numbness of a few minutes ago had evaporated. He was now terrified! If he wanted to live he had perhaps one cycle to plan

his escape. As the door closed, he resumed the careful exercises he had started earlier. Hopefully someone would come soon, both to change him and to cover him up. It was risky exercising his limbs when he was so exposed, but he had to be ready and the exercise would warm him. He was freezing!

Chapter 2

Cautiously, silently, Zooric eased the window open. It was pitch dark outside, but this was good. It was less likely that anyone was about, giving him a better chance of escaping undetected. The window squeaked as he lifted it and he froze, his leg rose in preparation to climb out. Tense, he strained his ears, even closing his eyes for a second, to better concentrate—but nothing. There was no movement outside his room and hopefully the entire house was asleep. Quickly this time, he adjusted his bundle—it did not hold much, just a few items he had gathered from the room, things he felt he would need to survive—and scrambled out. Zooric was not sure how long it would take him to walk home. However long it took, he would make it; there was no turning back. He would die rather than return to this house.

Caleel during the dark was eerie, with the dome shaped houses and buildings looking like miniature stepping-stones in a giant's pond. After leaving the house, Zooric deliberately kept to the shadows, his bare feet made no sounds on the rough pavement. As a pre-pubescent, he had no special senses to help him. But even that fact would work in his favor, because if he remained motionless around others, there were no electro-signals for even a Soosan to detect.

Silently, yet as swiftly as possible, he walked away from the house. He knew running would attract too much attention so he resisted that urge, besides he felt too weak to run. However, with an almost paranoid fear of discovery, he found himself looking back every few seconds. But there was no hue or cry—no alarm was raised. Again he made a silent vow. He would never go back. And he had no plans of stopping until he was well clear of Caleel.

His first act after leaving the town was to wash. It was a small body of water but with an almost frantic obsession to be clean, he did

not care. He went in, clothes and all. For him it was almost a ritual. In cleaning himself, washing, he was effectively washing away the past—putting it all behind him. He was dripping wet when he finally walked out of the water, but he made no effort to dry himself. In his mind, the act of natural drying completed his mental cleansing ritual.

He continued walking until first-light approached. The lightening skies found Zooric searching for a hiding place. Deeknor would be searching for him. This he did not doubt.

Like the town itself, this area was a fertile and lush region. Centuries ago much of the forest had been cleared, allowing roads to criss-cross the region. Through the ages, poor upkeep of the roadways had allowed the proliferation of sates, a naturally occurring purple ground cover that grew to ankle high. Sates seemed to naturally repel the dense woodlands and many farmers outside Caleel proper, after clearing the land, used the plant to keep the forest at bay.

Zooric finally found the ideal spot in one of the scattered remnants of the area's wooded past. It was in the middle of a ylieen tree. With branches as wide as an adult's torso, and leaves just as broad, the ylieen tree would provide an effective cover and would hide him completely from any casual observer, even one standing directly below the tree. However, getting into the center of the tree was tricky. The ylieen tree, when in bloom as this one was, often produced numerous multicolored buds. They were beautiful, but caused painful ylieen burns on the skin. Within a few cycles of contact, the skin would become irritated and swollen, forming unsightly white blotches that could take up to ten cycles to clear. Since Zooric was hoping he would not meet anyone, an unsightly skin condition was the least of his worries. He climbed a good distance off the ground to find a comfortable branch then hitched his bundle to the branch above. As he settled down to rest during the light, he examined his arms and legs. His skin was smooth, brown, virtually hairless, and as yet showed no signs of ylieen burns. But he wore a sleeveless tunic. It was the only clothing he could find in the room, and although the adult size of the tunic covered him completely, actually reaching to just above his knees, that still left all of his arms and most of his legs uncovered. He just hoped the ylieen burns he knew he would have to endure would be worth this effort to escape.

He closed his eyes with a sigh. But, as his body relaxed, images began crowding his mind. Saac ga! Not now! He did not want to deal with the emotional trauma of his immediate past. Unfortunately, his brain had other ideas. Even with his eyes squeezed tightly shut he was unable to banish the scenes of horror. The worst was the fuzzy nature of his memory. He would recall the end of a scene but not the beginning, or the middle but not the end. With a grimace he sat up. Pulling his knees to his chest, he wrapped his arms around them and stared aimlessly through the branches. He was exhausted, but unable to sleep.

Just how he had escaped with his mind intact would remain a mystery. Yet he was thankful. The incident had allowed his escape.

As far as he was concerned, the past was the past and he wanted it to stay that way. But with his brain playing tricks on him and intent on reliving hazy scenes that he had no wish to recall, he knew there would be no sleep for him this night.

The rest of the night was spent planning the best route home and designing a protective cover for his feet. He used leaves from the ylien tree and cautiously left his perch to retrieve flexible branches from other shrubs. There was no hurry and he wanted a sturdy foot cover. He knew the path from his father's farm to Caleel was well traveled and much of the territory was familiar because he had made the trip numerous times with his father. The problem was he would have to avoid the well-traveled paths. And travelling in the woods without foot protection would be painful if not impossible. However, now that his brain was finally free of the mind numbing drugs that they had been giving him, he knew he had a good chance of surviving. True he would have to avoid the open, but if he stayed to the edge of the forest he would not get lost. And much of the vegetation on Segaan was water rich. There were also numerous edible fruits. Besides, even without the water-filled plant life, he would not die of thirst. There were enough rivers and streams between here and his home.

His biggest worry was really an attack from any of the various wild animals. The most deadly was the feera. They were particularly vicious scavengers, but as nocturnal animals they hunted during the darkening. By traveling in the darkening, Zooric was hoping to avoid

contact with others, but a plus would be that his constant motion should reduce his risk of attack. He could sleep in trees during the light. The one wild animal capable of climbing trees was the wolar. But it was too big and lumbering to launch a silent attack. The wolar depended on its size to subdue and kill its prey. He was sure he would awake long before a wolar could plan an attack. Zooric was confident that he would survive—if only he could forget the past.

At second-dark, he climbed down from the tree and continued his journey. Because he had carried no food, he stopped periodically to scrounge around for wild nuts and fruits along the way. Initially, he planned to go directly to his parent's farm, but by the third cycle he felt the first simmering of awareness. Saac ga! It was happening!

Zooric stopped. As he stood absolutely still, a tingling of electricity ran throughout his body. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply. Why now? He wrapped his arms about his body as a powerful surge gripped him. It was the beginning of his electro senses! Now he would need a medic! During the first ten cycles of onset, his electro senses could fluctuate wildly. Only a medic could stabilize the electrical surges. He had heard that some boys went crazy without a medic. Zooric took deep breaths as another wave of awareness gripped him. It was followed almost immediately by that tingling of electricity. Even as he hugged himself protectively, he was mentally rebelling. No! No! No! No way was he going back. Yet, to get a medic he would have to return to the Caleel.

Zooric opened his eyes on during another powerful surge. It was pitch-dark, but he could now 'see.' Despite the urgency of his need, he looked around in wonder. It was unbelievable! Already his special electro-senses were displayed. Now, by sending small electro- pulses out into his surroundings and monitoring the return signals, he had a picture of the area around him. He could 'see' across the open land to the next group of trees. He could 'see' the animal life that had been invisible to him in the dark. It was even possible to 'see' where the land dipped and disappeared into the horizon. A bitter expression pulled at his features. Was this the reason he had survived that last incident?

Although the fog of numerous drugging had slowly faded, his memory was still hazy. Yet, he knew he should have been dead or badly sizzled; instead he had been stunned. Perhaps puberty started in the brain long before the electro skills showed. It was the only explanation he could think of.

Now he could no longer go home. If he went home, by law his father would have to take him to a Soosan medic for first-link testing and for treatment. All Owoons boys must undergo first-link, a test of their electro skills. And as a child of a Soosan, most likely he would test sensitive—and become a Soosan. He had already been initiated into the life of a Soosan by Deekec. He wanted no part of it.

Slowly, reluctantly, Zooric changed course and began heading into the underdeveloped area to the South of Caleel. Yet, mixed with his reluctance was a curious relief. True, he wanted to see his family. Of course he missed his parents, his sister and his brother. By leaving home, he had already accepted that he would never see them again. Returning now would mean he would have had to tell why he could not stay in Caleel. It was also possible that the men would demand his return—perhaps even force his father to give him up.

Zooric stopped, lifted his head and stared at the twinkling sky. The silence of the universe looked down at him. He was alone yet.... Zooric took a deep breath and, for the first time since his ordeal began, he cried. They were not silent tears, and they were endless. The emotional onslaught left him huddled on the ground, his arms wrapped tightly around his body. When the tears finally stopped he slowly rose, sniffing and wiping his face on his shoulder. Now he could admit a truth that had been nudging at the edge of his consciousness ever since he started this journey. He wanted to be alone. Here, there was no one to ask uncomfortable questions, and no one to force him to recall what he preferred to forget. He would not live in the wilds forever, but he would stay for as long as he could. Yes! He would at least learn to control his special senses. He even preferred the risk of going crazy. Perhaps with time he would learn how to hide the fact that he was a sensitive, was perhaps Soosan!

Over the next few cycles, Zooric slowly learned to manage and control his new skills. With constant practice, he was able to stretch

himself to the limits of his abilities. He had always been told by both adults and others his age that the initial surges were uncontrollable. This was definitely so, but they did not drive him crazy. They were an annoyance, yes, but functioning was not beyond ones capabilities. It was like a background noise that was irritating, but with determination could be ignored. The great positive was that, with his new skills came food. It took him two full cycles of practice before he learned how to generate a pulse just strong enough to kill his prey without burning the animal to a blackened crisp. The fact that he needed to practice control was positive proof that he was a high sensitive and could be a Soosan. For an ordinary Owoon, normally the difficulty was in generating a pulse strong enough to kill. But he also debunked another myth when he found that generating a pulse, even to kill a prey, did not reduce the violently swinging surges. Yet there were other advantages. Now that he could scan the surrounding area for movement, he no longer feared attacks by wild animals. He found that he could scan vast distances of level land, but mountain ranges or even large trees blocked his senses. There was one curious fact: he could detect the electro signals from even the smallest animal! Zooric never knew that there existed Soosans with that particular skill, but since he had never lived among real Soosans he was not concerned. After all, no Owoon really knew everything about the Soosans.

Zooric had been traveling for more than 100 cycles, in a southerly direction when his senses picked up some low-grade electrical impulses coming from a mountain range. The signals were so faint that had he not been actively scanning the area, he would have missed them. This far from Caleel, the land was uninhabited, but it had been explored by his people. Although he was now traveling during the light, in all that time, he had only seen two fur trappers. Fur trappers tended to travel with a pack of hunting rocleers and were notoriously protective of their territory. Like wild animals, some trappers would fight to keep others out of a given area. With his electro detection skills, Zooric was able to locate trappers long before they were even aware of him; he was therefore careful in giving them a wide berth.

It was possible this was another trapper. Zooric stopped to get a better feel of the signals. The vegetation here was much the same as

around Caleel, although there were less of the purple sate ground cover, and more dense areas of forest. This type of terrain was not ideal for long-range signals. Yet, the signals seemed to be coming from a distance. Curious, he slowly and cautiously tried to locate the source. Yes, they were coming from the looming mountain range. The question was, where? It could not be trappers—they did not travel in packs—maybe another settlement? He had never heard of another large settlement of Owoons. As he got closer, the signals did not become stronger. Puzzled, because somehow the signals did not seem normal, he tried again to pinpoint the source. It was then that he realized why the signals felt so strange. They were mechanically induced and not from a living being! Dense sates covered the pathway that led directly up to the mountain. There, on a narrow ledge about his height, were six large stones—each about the size of his head. Zooric stared. The stones were emitting the signals! They were large and oval and even as he gazed at them, understanding dawned. He had found an ancient Azar sector!

Frowning, Zooric tried to remember from past lessons whether an Azar entrance opened out or in, up or down. Hopefully it opened in, or down, because the door would never be able to open out with over 300 alifees of sediments collected behind it. Next, he tried figuring out how to open the entrance. From history lessons, he knew that the stones were the key. By pulsing the stones in a specific combination, the door would open. However, there were six stones. Ancient Azar poems that he had studied gave combination keys only for four stones. This meant that, unless he got lucky, it could literally take a lifetime to figure out this combination! Yet he intended to try. Taking a deep breath, he concentrated—focusing his electro-pulse on first one stone then another. Nothing happen. After a period of trial and error, he realized that four of the stones had a slightly different signal. Perhaps those four stones were the key? Throughout the course of the cycle he repeated his efforts, concentrating on the four stones, trying out different combinations learned from history lessons.

Five cycles later, after again pulsing the series of four stones, Zooric though he heard a sound. Frowning, he tried again. This time he both heard then felt something. The door was opening! Slowly, noisily

it opened downwards. Zooric scrambled out of the way as it fell with a thud. A blast of debris cascaded around him. Coughing and gasping, Zooric fled further away. When the dust finally settled, he moved forward, cautiously climbing over large and small rocks, as he made his way inside. What a find! His heart was humming with excitement. Soon he would have to report this to the Soosans—but not yet. This would be his one and only chance to explore.

Two alifees later Zooric was still exploring. It was not that he had changed his mind about reporting his find. Rather it was because of his fear—he was terrified he would be returned to the house in Caleel. Fortunately, he had not spent the time alone. About thirty cycles after his find, he found a young rocleeer. The animal had a terrible injury to his back, likely the result of a fight, and was on the verge of dying. More than likely a trapper had abandoned the animal. It was so sick it gave just a token growl as Zooric bent to examine the injury, but did not otherwise protest when Zooric carefully picked it up. It was another twenty cycles before the rocleeer, now named Soor, fully recovered. By then he was Zooric's faithful friend and companion. Rocleeers were the domesticated cousins of the wild feera and Zooric suspected that his rocleeer was half feera; it had grown so tall—reaching almost to his waist. The feeras in the wild were taller, although, like his pet, they too had small bodies in comparison to their massive heads and long skinny legs. Like the wild feeras, Soor also had short but thick black fur covering his entire body.

In truth, with Soor for companionship, and the comfort of the sector to live in, Zooric did not miss civilization. The sector had huge reading rooms that were still intact and he spent many cycles using his electro-skills to read the embedded electrical disc that was the Azar's primary recording method. As he explored deeper into the sector he was, however, assailed by guilt. The Azars had even more advanced technologies than his people; he really needed to report this find. It was his guilt that finally prodded him to travel north to Caleel. While living in the sector he had tamed two female pageens. The pageen was a smart four legged mammal strong enough to carry an adult male on its back.

They travelled in herds, typically lead by a male, ranging from a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 6. The best way to tame one was to separate it from the herd.

The smooth easy ride of the pageens could have easily reduced his journey to Caleel by half, but Zooric lingered. With Soor as a guard during the darkening, he no longer had to literally sleep with one eye open in fear of attack by any of the numerous wild animals, especially the feera.

Instinctively, he continued to avoid others. Using his electro detection abilities he found that he was able to sense others long before they were even aware of him. But as he approached the town, his senses were swamped with more and more electro-sensory information. He was literally picking up the electro signals of hundreds of citizens. At first, the static was overwhelming. Zooric dismounted. He allowed his pageens to walk slowly. Breathing deeply he caressed the animals, while striving for control. Finally, he stopped. He was on a wooded rise just above the center of town. He knew he could not go on —not because of the electro-sensory overload. True blocking was one skill that he was weak at —he had never had to practice. But he had easily learned how to block much of the incoming electro-sensory signals and as he drew on them, his skills improved. No. His problem was his deep-seated fear of capture. As he got closer to the town, long forgotten nightmares began plaguing him again. Zooric stood and gazed in silence. He could see the lights of the town at this distance. Soor, sensing his unease pressed closer.

“I know Soor,” he murmured. “There is nothing to fear. It is unlikely that they will even remember me.”

Yet he could not move! He mind was already screaming in blind panic. Also, with his block fully in place, he had lost one of his senses. It was like going deaf. He felt exposed, plus like a phobia, no amount of rational reasoning could convince him that the people of the town would not immediately pounce on him—or take him back to the house. Zooric turned away. He would have to find some other way to tell the Soosans about his find. Decision made, he began a rapid retreat. He was a full cycle away from the town before his heartbeat settled back to normal. But Zooric did not pause in his flight. He pushed his mounts,

determined to reach home in record time. With two mounts he was able to rest one while riding the other. It took less than fifty cycles to get back to his home in the Azar sector.

It was almost another four alifees later that Zooric next ventured out for Caleel. He had explored the entire sector and as he read his way through the vast selection of discs in the sector's massive reading rooms, he was amazed and astounded. Was he the only one with this knowledge? As more discoveries unfolded, he realized that he truly could not keep this find to himself. There were ancient maps... writings and artifacts. The people of Caleel needed to know. The Soosans had to be informed. The problem was getting the information to them.

On this attempt to reach Caleel, Zooric carried furs that he had collected. And this time luck was with him on his journey back. He met and aided an injured trapper. This was his first contact with another person since his escape and Zooric was surprised and pleased to discover that he could easily block the trapper's single electro signal while still maintaining his ability to detect other signals nearby. That was reassuring and helped to ease his fears as they approached the town. However, as he got nearer, he was again forced to put up a total block. Zooric fought his feelings of helplessness. Fortunately, the trapper was exceedingly grateful. Assuming that Zooric was new to the fur trade, he gave Zooric valuable information on selling furs; he also offered Zooric a place to stay when he learned that Zooric's family did not live in Caleel.

Five cycles later, with cash on hand and a completely new outfit, Zooric again left Caleel—this time for his parent's farm. His stay in Caleel had relieved some of his fears of capture but instinctively he continued to travel in the woods, avoiding all contact with others. Now, for this last part of his journey, he would have to use the path.

“Come Soor,” he said to the rocleeer at his side. “It is time to go back.”

The rocleeer wagged his stubby tail, and pressed its massive head against Zooric's leg. Zooric rubbed the animal's head then reluctantly straightened. Leading his pageens, he made his way down

the lightly wooded slope and onto the main path leading to the farm. Soon a cart, pulled by two caaceens pulled up. The caaceens was also a four-legged mammal capable of carrying an adult. However, the animal was viewed as less intelligent, when compared to the pageen, and was often used to pull wagon or carts. One big difference between the two animals was the huge head of the caaceen. Knocking on the caaceen's head produced a hollow sound similar to knocking on a hollow log.

“Do you need a ride, Zha?” the driver asked while keeping a close eye on the rocleer.

Zooric nodded his thanks. He was finding speech, or just communicating with others, difficult. For the last six alifees, just about all his conversations had been between him and his rocleer.

“Uh... I can't take the rocleer,” the Owoon said.

“No problem. Soor can follow.” He swiftly tied his pageens to the back of the cart.

“Are you from this area?”

Zooric cleared his throat a couple of times before speaking. “I am Zooric. I left here about eight alifees ago.” It was a risk giving his name, but he could think of no way to avoid it, especially since he intended to visit with his family.

“Zooric!” the driver stared. “Saac ga! Zooric! I cannot believe this. I am Bmees.”

At the driver's expectant looks, Zooric stared. Bmees was his younger brother. The last time he saw him he was a ragged youth of eight alifees. This was amazing!

Bmees was grinning widely. “You are Zooric aren't you?” He did not wait for an answer. “Yes. I recognize you now. You are so different. It it was difficult at first, but I did immediately think you looked familiar. That was why I stopped.” Without pausing he continued. “But where have you been? The man who took you, Zha Deeknor, he and a friend came looking for you after you ran away. When you did not return here, we all suspected you had died trying to return home.”

Even now, eight alifees later, just the mention of Deeknor's name was enough to cause Zooric to flinch. “I have lived as a fur trapper,” he said, after what he knew was a noticeable pause. “I knew

that I would get in trouble for running away. I was afraid to come home.” He was very thankful that, when he had escaped Deeknor's house, he had changed course and headed south.

Bmees nodded understandingly. “Eeng, Zha Deeknor was very angry when he came looking for you. Zha Deeknor gave father a lot of money for the honor of training you as a Soosan. When he realized you were not here, he wanted his money back and at first threatened to have father arrested for breach of contract. But father retaliated by accusing Zha Deeknor of ill treating you and causing you to run away.” Bmees grinned. “Of course Zha Deeknor backed down. He knew he was at fault for causing you to run away. But it is indeed fortunate that you were not here or he would have been sure to take you back. But why did you leave? What did he do?”

Bmees was naturally curious but Zooric was not up to satisfying his curiosity. This was just what he had been afraid of. Questions! “I did not like living with Deeknor,” he said flatly. That must have been the biggest understatement of his life! Yet he knew that if he began any explanations it would lead to more questions. He had no wish to answer questions.

“Did they not treat you well?” Bmees was puzzled and possibly confused by Zooric's use of Deeknor's name without a title. Politeness and respect were very important to the Owoon people. They routinely used titles to show respect, indicate relationships or delineate status. In fact, titles were omitted only among close friends or family. Therefore, for Zooric to omit the title of a non-relative was an extreme insult. “Were they not able to give you the life of a Soosan?”

Zooric tensed. He could not do this. Even after all this time, he still was not able to deal with his past. “I... I did not like it there,” he repeated.

Unsatisfied, Bmees stared. “But why? After Zha Deeknor approached father, father went to the Soosans. He had promised Zha Deeknor he would not, but he did not want trouble with the Soosans in the future. He only wanted to let them know that you were missing or possibly dead. But the Soosans were very interested in father's story. They paid us handsomely for information on Zha Deeknor. We heard later that Zha Deeknor had three other boys living at his house. And

soon after, they took all the boys away from Zha Deeknor. The boys were taken to the Soosan sector but Zha Deeknor and his friends disappeared. No one knows what became of him after the boys were taken away.” Bmees shrugged. “You know the Soosans. They tell us nothing of Soosan’s business. We suspect the boys must have eventually become Soosans because we have not heard from them again. There was a rumor that the Soosans were upset that Zha Deeknor had collected the boys and had punished him. No one knows for sure. Did he not give you the life of a Soosan as he promised?”

Zooric hunched his shoulders. “He did. I just did not like it.”

“The Soosans also collected all the other boys of Soosan fathers.”

“What did they do with them?” Zooric cautiously asked his first question.

“They lived with Soosan Protectors until first-link.” Bmees paused then added thoughtfully. “We all thought that all children of Soosan fathers would automatically become Soosans but there were a few boys that the Soosans did not take at first-link. These were boys who never lived with Zha Deeknor. Can you imagine how very disappointed they were not to become Soosan?” He paused again, this time in mortification. “I am sorry Zooric. I did not mean...” For the first time since their meeting, Bmees was at a loss for words.

With relief, Zooric realized that Bmees thought that he too had proven non-Soosan at first-link. He hastened to reinforce Bmees belief. “I have had time to accept,” he said. “And I really do not mind that I am not Soosan.”

Bmees stared in astonishment. “You do not wish to be Soosan?”

“Zte,” Zooric said firmly. “I like my life as it is. I have lived as a fur trapper outside Caleel for some time, and I like it.” He did not add that after living in Deeknor’s house, he had no wish to repeat the experience as a Soosan.

“How are mother and father?”

Fortunately for him, Bmees went along with the change of subject and was happy to bring him up to date with news of their parents. By the time they arrived at the front entrance of the farm he

had learned that his sister had bonded. She lived on the farm with her mate and three children.

No one rushed out to meet them as Bmees pulled the cart up beside the dome-shaped animal house. But that was not usual. At this hour, the family was likely preparing for the end cycle meal. The place looked prosperous and almost unrecognizable. Because his parents had been poor, Zooric was surprised at the condition of the farm. Remembering Bmees mention of a reward from the Soosan, he imagined that his father had used the money to expand.

“Hurry,” Bmees urged him.

Bmees had already watered and fed his caceens but Zooric was taking his time, fussing over his pageens. However, finally acknowledging that he was delaying the inevitable, he gave the animals’ one last pet before following Bmees to the family’s living quarters. It was located just a short distance from the animal house. Zooric breathed slowly as he tried to control his fear. He could only block one strong signal while maintaining a partial block and already he was sensing strong electro signals— indicating the presence of others. Again Zooric found the sensory overload enormous. He knew he would be able to function only by blocking the entire electro signals—using full block. Now, as much as he longed to see his parents, he wondered if he could just leave his information with Bmees then leave. But already they were at the door! Very reluctantly, he followed Bmees into the house.

“Look who I found!” Bmees announced as he walked in the main room.

The words made him the focus of all eyes. There were four adult Owoons in the room. Zooric recognized his parents easily. And the children he placed as children of his sister, which made the other female Owoon his sister, and the male, her mate.

Bmees began chuckling at their blank stares. “This is Zooric!” he stated triumphantly.

“Zooric!” his mother cried. “Zooric! I cannot believe this.” She began crying as she hurried toward him with outstretched arms. “Zooric!”

Zooric was enfolded in her arms. “Mother!” Despite his effort to block, he was swamped with her emotions. Zooric tried to pull away

as he realized the contact was inhibiting his blocking skills—but his mother refused to release him. She was squeezing him and crying at the same time. As his father also approached, Zooric tensed, expecting another flood of emotions, but to his surprise he was able to block his father. Yet he could not relax, not with his mother's intense emotions on the verge of overwhelming him. It literally felt as if she was projecting her emotions into his head. Yet, there was no time to analyze this strange effect. He could not remember the last time he had thought of his parents. Mentally he had chosen to survive, and for the longest time surviving for him meant forgetting the past. Unfortunately, forgetting the past—although the less traumatic alternative—had included forgetting his family. Now, unable to block his mother's feelings, the memories and emotions were almost unbearable. Sniffing and blinking he tried hard to hold back from the emotional onslaught, but tears were trickling down his cheeks as he returned their hugs.

“We thought you were dead.” His father voiced the thoughts of them all.

“I am fine,” Zooric said as he gently pulled out of his mother's hold. As loving and caring as her emotions were, they were too much, and there was a limit to how much he could take. Even when he finally stepped away, Zooric found that he was still struggling to block her. “I have spent my time away as a fur trapper.”

“But why did you not return sooner?” The question came from his sister.

“I was afraid. I knew... I knew Deeknor would come looking for me. I was not sure how... when he would stop looking.”

“We cannot understand why you ran away,” his mother was still upset. “Did he ill- treat you?”

Their questions were endless, yet Zooric's answers got briefer and briefer.

“I did not wish to stay.” It was all he would say. And his answer was just as unsatisfying to his family as it had been to Bmees. Like Bmees, they all tried to pry more information from him. Like Bmees they soon found that the happy, cheerful boy, who had left home, could in no way be compared with this guarded and wary adult.

Unlike the average person who would be spurred into speech, just to break an uncomfortable silence, Zooric clearly felt no such compulsion. And as the questions continued, his preferred method of dealing with those he did not wish to answer became silence. Without embarrassment, fuss or noticeable discomfort, he just refused to answer questions not to his liking.

After the third such uncomfortable gap in the conversation, his family gave up. Fortunately for them all, Bmees was Zooric's opposite, in that he seemed driven by compulsion to fill any significant pause in the conversation. He took Zooric to his room to change and clean up for the end-cycle meal, then later began eagerly feeding Zooric news of the farm, their neighbors even the most trivial of current events.

Zooric could see where others would find Bmees chatter exhausting. He didn't—at least not initially. It was strangely comforting to realize that holding up his end of the conversation only required him to nod, shake his head or otherwise give some indication that he was listening. However, by the time Zooric and Bmees returned to the main room to eat, even grunting 'yes' or 'no' was a strain. He was convinced that he had heard Bmees' entire life story, and then some. Now he was actually beginning to worry about surviving the meal. But he lucked out. It seemed food placed a temporary halt to Bmees chatter. During the meal his brother's speech was strictly limited to requests for more food. Thankfully, Zooric settled down to eat as he listened to the flow of conversation around him without joining in.

Traditionally, the entire family gathered after the meal. It was an informal gathering where they would often play games or just socialize. As they sat, Zooric began removing a total of five objects from him pocket. Then initiating the conversation for the first time, he revealed his staggering find.

"I have discovered an ancient Azar sector. It was a small one, perhaps home to about 5,000 Azars. It was called Nergeet and it will take about fifty cycles to reach it if traveling by pageen. It is south of Caleel.

"What!" His father jerked up right.

"Saac ga!"

The astonishment was universal. They gathered around in amazement, eying the unusual artifacts. Included was a very old map, yet it was made of a parchment very similar to what the Owoons now used for writing.

Zooric pointed to the map. "I believe that many alifees ago Owoons had to have lived in the sector. There are other finds but I brought this map as proof because the Azars did not store information on parchment."

"No one has ever discovered an Azar sector," Bmees commented as he fingered the finds.

"This is unbelievable!" his father commented. Carefully he opened the map. "This map shows various Azar sectors. Look!" he pointed out the closest sector to the North. "Here is another one that is close to us—named Yotse. And it looks much larger than Nergeet. We must tell the Soosan."

"Will they reward us, do you think?" his sister's mate asked.

"It is very possible. This is really an astonishing find. But with the Soosan as it is, a reward is uncertain."

"Uncertain?" Zooric queried.

His father nodded. "There has been much grumbling about many of the recent verdicts of the Soosan. Many do not like the direction the new Jirga has taken and the policies that have been adopted." Here his father shrugged—a reflection of the general acceptance of the Soosan's rule. "But nothing can be done."

They all nodded in agreement. In fact, no Owoon would even dream of overthrowing the Soosan, forcing a change, or even questioning the edicts of the Soosan. Soosans were the rulers and that was an accepted fact.

"Soosan policy has changed for the worse," Bmees said. "They are not as fair as they were in the past. Many do not like the current Jirga. If only he was close to the end of his life-cycles."

"Unfortunately this is not so," his father said as he picked up a curious instrument. "The old Jirga died suddenly and the current Jirga is very young, only about twenty-two alifees. We have never had so young a Jirga. Perhaps that is the reason for the erratic leadership."

Zooric was not interested in the age or leadership abilities of the Soosan. He was not interested in the Soosan, period!

At his lack of response, his father continued, after only a slight pause. “Regardless of who the Jirga is, we must take this information to the Soosan. Zooric, would you be able to find your way back to the sector?”

Zooric nodded. “I have prepared a map with instructions on how to find the entrance.”

This he brought out and placed it on the table.

“We can take this to the Soosan the next cycle.” Bmees said excitedly.

Their father agreed. “Eeng. This should definitely be taken to them immediately.”

Bmees nodded. “It would indeed be serious if we did not inform them of this at once.”

At that comment, Zooric wisely refrained from telling them that he had discovered the sector a good six alifees ago.

They planned into the darkening. Bmees and his sister’s mate would go to the Soosan sector with the information. Zooric would stay at the farm for a few cycles before leaving.

“But why leave?” his mother asked.

“I wish to remain a fur trapper,” he said. “I will not disappear forever. I will return often.”

Again his family did not understand, and again Zooric refused to explain. He could not tell them of his discomfort around others. To prevent the swamp of emotion, he had to block out all incoming electro sensory information and with his blocking skills so poor, that effort took most of his concentration. It also left him sensory deprived and he was definitely not accustomed to the sensation. Perhaps his skills would improve with use, but he had another major problem—what if the Soosan suspected him to be a sensitive? Even informing the Soosan of his find was a risk. However, since some of the boys of Soosan fathers had tested normal, he was hoping that they would assume him to be a normal Owoon who had just accidentally stumbled on the correct combination to open the Azar sector.

Nevertheless, he would have to take care, even with his family. How could he admit that he had never had first-link? More than likely he was the first Owoon male to miss first-link and he was sure there was a penalty—he just did not know what it was. There could also be a punishment for hiding his sensitive nature. Again, he did not know. For certain, if the Soosan discovered him, they would take him to the Soosan sector.

Early the next cycle, the Owoons left for Caleel. But like many plans, this one did not work out as expected. Less than four cycles later, a large contingent of Soosan Protectors arrived at the farm. The Soosan was holding both Bmees and the mate of Zooric's sister. The men would be released only if Zooric returned to the Soosan sector. No explanations were given. The Protectors were all Owoons except for the officer. He was Gaare Retran, a Soosan and the head of the Soosan Protectors.

Zooric did not attempt to escape. They did not say why they wanted him, but Zooric recognized that such a high-level delegation meant business. Besides, he could not in all good conscious leave his brother in the custody of the Soosan. So he went with the guards to the Soosan sector, a place he had vowed never to enter. It was another horrendous cycle later, after a short but violent fight with the leader of the Soosan, before he was free again. In the confusion after the fight, they had willingly allowed him to go. Zooric was still not sure why he was released, but he did not stop to question his good fortune. He had even secured the release of his brother and the mate of his sister. Still, Zooric hated his time there. Not only were his memories still too painful, there were Soosans now who provided a constant reminder of his past. The only good that came from his time in the sector was that it proved that Deeknor had actually distorted the lifestyle of Soosans for his own sick and corrupt propose.

However, with his release he was not about to chance the Soosan changing course and perhaps again demanding his return. He would have to leave. True he would miss his parents, his brother and his sister. He had enjoyed playing with the children of his sisters and had

even begun learning to live with the flood of his mother's emotions. While he was reluctant to leave them, his fear of recapture was too strong. He knew he could not stay. This time he decided to head north. During his time in the sector to the south of Caleel he had read extensively. And from the writings of an Azar psychic named Loya Favood, he had discovered the secret the Soosans were hiding from the Owoons people. He would find this alien race of people, the Tifoosas.

Arapmo

Chapter 3

Arapmo was the only outpost of the colonists and the town's existence was due solely to the sheer determination of twenty men. It was nine years ago that Dennis Classet, together with nineteen other mavericks, decided to petition for an expedition to venture into the interior. Of course they each had their own agenda. The Council's rigid policies and regimental control was unchallenged in the close environment of New World City, but would the Council be able to maintain control of its citizens if the population were more dispersed? The expedition plans did not sit well with the Presidential Council. The Council was unaware of the secret alliances of the men, but even so, their fear of possible dissidents would not have been their sole objection. No expedition could be undertaken lightly. Because their initial population was so small, one of the guiding rules of the Presidential Council was the preservation and creation of life. Through a policy of careful planning, the population of Alloca was steadily increasing and no one—not even the dissatisfied minority—wanted to put the population at risk. For the Presidential Council however, pragmatism won. After 300 years the colonist had mostly exhausted the supplies of the First Valley. They needed to venture out.

With the Council's approval, the expedition was set. Most of the population of New World City predicted disaster. Even now, 300 years later, stories of the attacks by the revos were still chilling. The revo was not the only wild predator on Alloca, but they were the least

understood and the most feared. These huge animals were said to be over nine feet tall, hairy and vicious. Yet, there was no accurate description. No one had ever seen a revo up close and lived to tell about it. The early colonist had no defense against the hairy monsters. The weirdest thing about the attacks was that the revos always took away the female bodies of their victims yet left behind the males—dead yet strangely unscarred. The early colonists were never able to figure out the cause of death. It was believed that the revos ate their victims and preferred female flesh. Only one male body was unaccounted for and suspected eaten by a revo. The colonist lost almost a quarter of their population before the attacks stopped—as suddenly as they had begun. In the last 300 years no one had ever seen a revo again. The speculation was that the early colonist might have passed on some disease to the revo that had wiped them out. Now, the sole monument commemorating the attacks was the names of all forty-four victims inscribed in a memorial in the First Colonist Museum.

In the first expedition attempt, the group headed north. But they found temperatures even more extremely hot than that of New World City. Since no one wanted to deal with temperatures averaging over 120 degrees every cycle, the second expedition headed south. To the south of New World City, the terrain was hilly and the elevation got higher and higher. Yet this time around, to the chagrin of the doomsayers, the expedition was a roaring success. The explorers traveled for over a month and again, they encountered unexpectedly harsh weather. But at least, because of the higher elevation, the temperature dipped in the other direction. Arapmo in fact, was discovered purely by accident as the explorers tried to avoid the extreme freezing weather. It was a beautifully sheltered valley. Plus, Arapmo escaped most of the harsher dips in temperature experienced by the surrounding countryside. Which was why, even though the town did not have all the conveniences of the city, the people of Arapmo loved their little town. And with the discovery of the precious metal—moonglitter—the town's future was secure. It was expanding rapidly, too rapidly some older members of Arapmo were saying. They were afraid that the town was attracting opportunist and thrill seekers.

But right now Arapmo was a safe outpost—this despite the simmering tension among its citizens. There were no recorded murders in Arapmo’s short history. And even petty crimes were almost nonexistent. The main problem was that the twenty colonists to finally win approval for the venture had one thing—and only one thing—in common; they all wanted freedom from the Council’s laws. Unfortunately, it was only after founding Arapmo that they discovered the hidden agendas within the groups. Still, they had achieved one goal. And with an unsteady alliance still holding, seven of the original mavericks formed the Arapmo Town Council—the ruling body of the town. They all recognized that even greater than the threat of open warfare among the citizens of Arapmo, was the danger posed by the Presidential Council.

It was the united goal of the two factions living within Arapmo to keep the Presidential Council out of their town. Now with rumblings from the Presidential Council already beginning, some in Arapmo were fearful of a showdown. As yet, the majority of Arapmo still favored independence from the Presidential Council. But what if the Council sent the Presidential Guards to enforce their order? What then? War? Some favored moving even further inland to escape the Council’s reach. Already the town’s population was starting to take sides. Those willing to fight to keep Arapmo independent of the Presidential Council, even if it meant fleeing, and those willing to give in to avoid a confrontation.

Carrie Classet stood by her window and watched the dawn of first-light. She had nothing planned for this cycle. It was getting harder and harder to wait patiently. In less than one month, word should reach them from the Presidential Council. She was waiting on a ruling on her petition to refuse her marriage agreement, and the waiting was killing her. What if they received a negative ruling? It was a distinct possibility. Carrie knew her father would never accept the Council’s authority.

What would happen then was anyone’s guess. She knew where her father stood. He had founded Arapmo and he planned to fight, if a fight was needed, to keep the Council out of his town. Carrie did not want to leave Arapmo. She loved Arapmo, and had lived here most of her life. The very thought of having to live in New World City with a stranger for a husband was scary. The very thought of living in New

Work City, with a stranger for a husband, was scary. But neither did she want to be the cause of a rift between Arapmo and New World City. And a war! Her father kept insisting that the Presidential Council was too protective of lives to go to war. Carrie was not so sure. And Arapmo was too small to take on the Presidential Guards! When she thought of the effort her father had put into building this town, she felt like crying.

Carrie stirred. She could not stand here forever. She would go to the fluar's watering hole. No one in Arapmo had ever tamed a fluar. No one on the entire planet had ever tamed a fluar! The animals were incredibly shy and although catching them was not impossible, they usually died almost immediately upon capture. The longest one had lived in captivity was three cycles. She had watched this particular fluar every first-light for the past three weeks, and already it seemed tame. One light it even came within two feet of Carrie. Perhaps, she thought morbidly, this would be her parting gift to Arapmo—taming a fluar.

She dressed quickly, pulling on a thick jacket and ankle boots. The jacket came only to her hips, but that was okay because she wore a thick divided skirt, which reached to her boots. At this time of the year, first-light in Arapmo could see temperatures in the fifties. Carrie opened her door quietly and padded down the hall. No one was up. The house was so large and spacious that it took Carrie a few minutes to negotiate the downstairs rooms. Her father had amassed a vast outpost and he had specifically built their home to mirror a typical New World City mansion.

Originally, her father bred zigs, but he also owned one of the largest moonglitter mines in Arapmo. Carrie quietly left the house. She was headed first to the barns, which were just a short distance behind the house. Within minutes she was sneaking in through the small supply door at the back. Carrie moved silently down the stalls to her zig. She knew the animal would not welcome her at this hour.

Zigs were notoriously lazy at just about all times. Although great at pulling heavy loads, they were not as intelligent as the fluar. The zig and the fluar were the only large animals that the colonist viewed as having any potential as safe domesticated beasts of burdens. The zig was easily trainable and reminded the early colonists of an old

world animal called a mule. However, it was twice the size of a mule plus much slower and lumbering. It was called zig because of its tendency to wander in mindless zigzag patterns when feeding in the wild. The fluar however, was still a mystery. Faster, taller and sleeker than the zig, it looked to be an incredibly smooth ride if one could ever tame it.

“I tell you we can easily increase the loads. These zigs can take twice what they are carrying now. Plus, now we have the cabin to use for storage.”

Carrie instinctively ducked below one of the stalls. She did not recognize the voice and she knew every worker on her father’s outpost.

“It takes almost two full lights to reach the cabin. That’s too far for even a zig to carry such a heavy load.”

That was Tim’s voice, Carrie thought. Tim had started working for her father only five cycles ago. He should be at the mine camp, not here at the outpost.

“I’m giving both of you a fair cut. It is enough for now. We will keep the load the same.”

Carrie did not recognize that voice either. Who were these men? Her heart began pounding. Whatever they were planning did not sound good. She had to get back to the main house! Carrie began inching back toward the door. As she passed a stall, one of the zigs grunted. Carrie froze!

“What was that?” Tim asked.

“Quit sweating. A zig probably groaned.” The first man was contemptuous of his friend’s fear.

“Chris go check,” one of the strange voices ordered.

“It was just....”

“Check!”

There was no way the man, Chris, would not see her if he came in her direction. Abandoning caution Carrie turned to flee.

“What the bolt!”

Carrie rushed toward the door in terror. She almost made it. Less than two paces from the door, the man slammed into her. They both fell to the ground.

“Who the fire bolt is it?” Tim asked. He and the other man had also rushed forward.

Carrie was too stunned to move even when the man rose off her. She groaned as rough hands flipped her onto her back.

“Carrie!” Tim stared at her in amazement. “What are you doing here at this hour?”

“I was going to ride out early.” Carrie was unable to keep the fear out of her voice, “to look at the fluars.”

Tim turned to the stranger. “She is Mr. Classet’s daughter. We can’t.... That is....” his voice trailed off miserably in the face of a sharply raised eyebrow and an incredulous look from one of the strangers.

“I’m sure she heard us,” the stranger stroked his clean shaved chin as he gave Carrie a contemplative look. “So this is the pretty thing that has the entire town in an uproar.”

Carrie’s heart was hammering. She had never seen anyone with such cold eyes—as green as the Allocan skies—they terrified her.

“I... I...”

“Don’t bother denying it.” He interrupted her with a dismissive wave of his hand before turning to the two men. “She may come in useful in the future. Tim, saddle one of the zigs. Chris will have to take her to the cabin.”

This man was clearly the boss. He moved decisively toward her.

“No!” Carrie screamed as she tried scrambling away. “Tim! Please!” she turned terrified eyes to Tim, but the young man turned beet-red and refused to make eye contact. Chris grabbed her firmly, and clamped a hand over her mouth. As Carrie wriggled and kicked wildly, the stranger pulled a small injector from his pocket. She was able to get only one solid kick to the stranger’s shin before he slammed the injector into her thigh.

With a moan Carrie collapsed forward.

Chapter 4

Zooric watched with narrowed eyes as the male Tifoosa began climbing the narrow path into the mountains. The female he carried was

still slumped over on his caceen. Although they both wore thick outer coverings, he was almost sure the rider was male and the one slumped over the caceen he assumed to be female because her head was covered with long curling black strands of hair that had become loose. The hair on the male's head was shorter and was a light brown in color, but different hair colors also corresponded to the Writings of Loya Favood and did not surprise him. According to Loya Favood, the Tifoosas came with hair and skin colors ranging from dark brown to a pinkish white. These two definitely fit the descriptions given by Loya Favood. They even had different skin colors, with the male a golden yellow color and the female pale brown. Even so, her skin was not as dark a brown as Zooric's.

Zooric exhaled excitedly. He could not believe.... When he began his journey, he never imagined he would actually see any of the Tifoosas, especially so close to Caleel. Traveling steadily, it had taken him almost 200 cycles to reach this valley. His first shock was the discovery of the Tifoosa settlement within the valley. The Azar's settlement of Yotse was not a shock—this he had expected to find and he did. But the Writing of Loya Favood told only of a Tifoosa settlement further north. He was now glad he had chosen to leave Caleel. If not for the event in the Soosan sector, it is unlikely that he would have ventured so far from home. But once again, he had learned valuable information for the Soosan. The Tifoosas were a much larger group than he or they had imagined—and they were spreading! Later he would decide how to leave the Soosan this new information. Right now he was not sure he was willing to take the chance of going back.

The cycle before, just before first-light, he had discovered the entrance to Yotse. Getting in was not a difficulty, but by then he was too keyed up to remain there or to probe deeper into the sector. He left Soor guarding one of his pageens, while he explored the surroundings. It was then that he spotted the Tifoosas shortly after they left one of the large resting areas of their settlement. The Tifoosa's settlement was not as large as Caleel, but even so, he had bypassed it, fearing to show himself to such a large population. Now, here were two Tifoosas close at hand. He was itching to make contact. His greatest wish was to make contact. This may well be his best chance. These two

If you have enjoyed this sample,
buy now at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Price Print: \$9.99 eBook:\$2.99

ISBN: 9781549691447

For purchase information contact:

Peltrovijan Publishing

peltrovijan@yahoo.com