

"A New Beginning"
by grayladyfalcon



Opening Dialogue

The time...about six months after Hawk had lost his beloved mate, Koori. The place... on board the Searcher. Still in the beginning stage of his punishment. Hawk had proven his abilities to the Admiral and almost everyone on the Searcher. He had become a good friend to the man who he fought with on the planet of Throm. Hawk, still missing his mate had gained new friends in some of the crew. One in particular, Dr. Goodfellow.

The good doctor would often visit Hawk in his living quarters and show him some of the archive pictures of the old planet Earth and his ancestors that came from there. They would talk for hours on end. Hawk never seemed to get tired of the kind and gentle man. His laugh, the way he looked directly in to Hawk's eyes when he spoke. Even his passion for Hawk's people whom he had never met. Occasionally Hawk would be ordered to the bridge. Though he didn't like being ordered around, he complied. Being escorted up by two security guards. The Admiral, being understanding of why Hawk attacked those humans before, tried hard to make him feel like part of the crew.

Hawk would enter the bridge and the first smiling face he would see was that of Wilma's. Every time he would see Wilma, he thought of how much she was like Koori. In his eyes he saw that Wilma had Koori's strength and compassion. He would turn away quickly if she gazed back to him.

Buck would be standing behind her. He would walk up to Hawk and extend his hand. Hawk always happy to see a friend would extend his hand in return. The Searcher had been given orders by the Galactic Council to proceed to a small planet only three light years away. It seemed that there was some disagreement going on. The Searcher was ordered to monitor and assist if needed.

Chapter 1

"Admiral, what is the name of this planet? And why would anyone attack them?" Buck asked.

"The planets name is Osjewelco, it's located in the Macadon system. They're the only agricultural planet in that system. We should arrive there within twelve hours," the Admiral replied.

"What seems to be the trouble there sir?" Wilma asked.

"All I know is that there has been raids and some of the people are missing. What started it is unknown at this time," Asimov replied.

"Sir, Hawk's ship has been sitting in landing bay 3 now since he came on board. With your permission, would it be all right if he took it out on patrol with me?" Buck asked glancing over at Hawk.

The Admiral turned and gazed at Hawk for a moment.

"On one condition... Hawk, if we think you are trying to make an escape, we will destroy you and your ship." The Admiral hesitated for a moment. "I'm hoping that you give us a chance to show you that not all humans are murders," the Admiral said looking in to Hawk's eyes.

"I understand Admiral. I will not try to run, you have my word," Hawk replied.

"Very well then. Hawk you will go out on patrol with Buck and the other pilots. Be sure his ship is fueled and ready to go," the Admiral ordered.

"Yes sir," Buck replied with a smile.

The Admiral ordered the security guards to release Hawk in to Buck's custody. The guards backed away and Buck motioned for Hawk to follow him. They made their way down to the landing bay hanger. As they entered Hawk seen his ship for the first time since he was brought on to the Searcher. He walked up to it and gently ran his fingers over every inch of the hull.

"It's been repaired?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, shortly after the agreement was made, the Admiral ordered the mechanics to repair your ship, just in case," Buck replied with a smile.

Hawk turned to Buck and for the first time since he was brought on to the Searcher, he smiled.

One of the mechanics walked over to Buck and Hawk. "Captain Rogers.. Hawk's ship will be fueled and ready with in the hour," the mechanic said glancing over at Hawk.

"Good. We'll be back then," Buck replied as he and Hawk left the hanger.

Hawk turned to Buck. "Why are you doing this?" Hawk asked.

"I figured you might want to fly it again. And the Admiral told me you've been asking about your ship for over a month now. So I figured maybe, the Admiral would allow you to fly it out on patrol with me," Buck said.

An hour had passed, Buck and Hawk were on their way back to the hanger. Hawk walked quickly over to his ship and climbed in. Sitting in it again put a smile on his face that even the mechanics could see. Buck climbed in to his fighter and started to run his check.

"Patrol one requesting permission to leave Searcher," Buck said.

"Searcher to patrol one, permission granted," the bridge replied.

With in moments Buck's fighter was in the launch tube and was on its way out. Hawk followed then the other patrol fighters. Hawk was amazed at the speed his ship was launched out of the launch tube. He soon joined Buck and the other pilots. Buck started to head off in front of the Searcher. Hawk followed close behind Buck.

"Hawk, why don't you open it up a little? It's been a while since you flew it. She probably needs a good work out," Buck said glancing over his left shoulder at Hawk.

Hawk hesitated. "I'm not sure if I should. I don't want the Admiral to think I'm trying to run," Hawk replied.

"Rogers to Searcher."

"Searcher here, what is it Buck?" the Admiral asked.

"Sir, Hawk's ship has been sitting for a long time. Requesting permission for Hawk to open it up a little. Just to get the dust blown off of her," Buck said.

There was a hesitation. "Permission granted.. But Hawk, remember what I told you earlier. And Buck, stay with him at all times," Asimov replied.

"Yes sir," Buck said with a smile.

"Well, you heard the man. Open it up and get that dust off of your ship," Buck said looking over at Hawk's ship.

Hawk smiled and leaned on the throttle. At first the War Hawk was a little sluggish. Hawk leaned on the throttle a little more and left Buck behind.

"How is it handling Hawk?" Buck asked as he caught up to Hawk's ship.

"At first, it was a little slow, but after I pushed it a little harder it cleared right up," Hawk replied.

They continued their patrol. Finally their patrol was over and they were returning to the Searcher. Buck entered first, followed closely by Hawk, then the other pilots. They landed their ships with a smooth landing. Buck was the first to climb out of his fighter. He walked over to Hawk's ship and watched as Hawk sat in it for a few moments longer. He opened the hatch and climbed out. Buck walked over to him and smiled.

"Felt good, didn't it?" Buck asked.

Hawk nodded and smiled, then he began walking around his ship gently running his hand over the hull.

"Hawk, what are you doing?" Buck asked.

"I always make a walk through when I come back from space. Just to make sure there are no leaks or damage," Hawk replied.

"Come on, we have to report to the bridge for de-briefing," Buck said smiling. He could see the joy Hawk had in his eyes.

Hawk turned and slowly started to walk behind Buck leaving the hanger area. He'd glance back over his shoulder and looked at his ship, the ship that he once flew over Throm to protect it from raiders and intruders. They made their way back up to the bridge where the Admiral was waiting for them to report. The bridge door opened with a whoosh...Hawk and Buck walked on to the bridge and was met by the Admiral who motioned for them to enter the bridge meeting room. Buck and Hawk walked in and seated themselves in front of the Admiral's desk.

"Well, how did it go?" he asked.

"No problems to report sir," Buck replied.

Asimov looked over at Hawk. "Hawk, I know you feel like a prisoner here on this ship. I've made a call to the Galactic Council, and they approved my request. You've proven yourself to be reliable when you didn't run. You never caused any trouble or problems here on the Searcher. I've requested that you be placed on probation on the Searcher," Asimov said.

Hawk looked a little confused. "Probation Admiral? What do you mean by probation?" Hawk asked.

The Admiral smiled. "It means Hawk that you will no longer be under arrest and have to remain in your living quarters. You'll be able to walk around the ship, go on patrols with Buck, come and go as you please," Asimov replied.

Hawk smiled for a moment. "Does that mean I'll be able to return home soon Admiral?" Hawk asked.

"I'm afraid not Hawk, not for a while anyways. The Galactic Council has to be shown that what you did before will never happen again," Asimov replied.

"Sir, no disrespect to the Council, but how is it suppose to happen again? Those humans slaughtered all of my people on Throm. Not one of them survived, including my beloved mate, Koori," Hawk replied.

Buck hung his head. Deep down inside Buck knew it was mostly his fault that Koori died. If he hadn't taken her that day from the cave, she'd most likely be alive today.

"All I'm saying Hawk, is that you have to prove to the council that it will never happen again...anywhere," Asimov said as he stood up. "I know that's a lot to think about, I'm leaving it up to you," Asimov said as he walked towards the door.

Hawk and Buck stood and walked over to the door and stood in front of the Admiral.

"I'll think about it," Hawk replied as he walked out of the meeting room.

Chapter 2

Hawk left the bridge and headed down the corridor to his living quarters. He turned around and seen that there were no security guards following him. He watched the facial expressions of the crew members as they passed by. Some smiled and said hello while others walked past without even acknowledging him. "I'm still a prisoner, guards or no guards," he thought to himself. He placed his hand on the panel outside of his door and entered. He slowly walked over at gazed out the portal. "All I want is to return home. I know there is nothing left of my people, but it is still my home," he said to himself as he hung his head. He walked slowly into the sleeping area and sat on the edge of his bed. Hawk laid down and rested his head on his hands, looking up at the ceiling. What seemed like hours to Hawk was only a matter of minutes before he drifted off to sleep. A few hours later came a buzzing noise, Hawk opened his eyes and sat up. He knew there was someone at the door. He stood and walked slowly over to the door and opened it. Buck was standing there with a smile on his face.

"Hey, it's time to go down to this planet and see what's going on. You ready to go?" Buck asked.

Hawk still not fully awake stood there for a moment. "I'm going?" Hawk asked.

"Yeah, the Admiral wanted a full crew, so I recommended you," Buck replied.

"Who else is going?" Hawk asked.

"It's just going to be you, Wilma and myself... for now. Murphy and Anderson will join us in town a few hours later. They're acting as back-up to us, just in case," Buck said.

Hawk nodded and left his quarters, walking along side Buck to the hanger. They entered and standing along side her fighter was Wilma. She greeted them with a smile, as she often did.

"Hawk, your ship is fueled and ready to go," Wilma said smiling.

"I thought I'd be going with Buck in his?" Hawk asked a little confused.

"No, the Admiral requested we take different ships down to the planet surface," Wilma replied.

Hawk smiled, walked over to his ship and climbed in.

Buck turned to Wilma. "Thanks Wilma. This means a lot to Hawk being able to fly his own ship," Buck said softly.

"He's a good pilot. I watched how he maneuvered his ship out on patrol with you earlier. He could be a great asset to the Searcher," Wilma replied.

"I know, if only he could feel more like part of the crew instead of a prisoner," Buck said glancing over at Hawk.

"Give it time Buck, nothing happens over night." Wilma glanced over at Hawk's ship as he ran a check on the ship's instrument panel. "You ready to go?" she asked turning her attention back to Buck.

Buck nodded and started for his fighter. They simultaneously climbed in and closed the hatch.

"Bridge.. this is Col. Deering.. requesting permission to launch," Wilma requested.

"Permission granted.... Searcher out."

Wilma was the first to be launched out of the launch tube, followed by Buck then Hawk. After exiting the Searcher, they joined up and descended down towards the planets surface. Not wanting to draw attention, they landed in a small clearing not far from a village. They climbed out of their fighters and assembled in front of them.

"Remember, we're only here to observe and report." Wilma turned and looks at Buck. "No fighting Buck, understood?" Wilma asked.

"Who me? I only fight when I have to," Buck replied.

Hawk smiled. "Which is about all the time," Hawk replied with a smile.

Buck turned to face Hawk. "Hey," Buck replied jokingly.

"Okay you two, lets check out that small village we seen coming in. Maybe someone there can tell us what's going on," Wilma said as she turned around and started to walk towards the village.

Buck and Hawk followed close behind. Just as they were about to emerge out of the forest line on the east side of the village. They heard what appeared to be weapons being fired, followed by women screaming and children crying. They quickened their pace. Wilma was the first to witness the murderous act that was taking place in the village. She saw a woman holding her young child close, soon a shot rang out. Wilma watched as the woman and child fell to the ground. Still horrified by what she had just seen, Wilma froze with her hands covering her mouth. Buck and Hawk turned to Wilma.

"Wilma?" Buck said softly seeing the look of horror on her face.

Hawk was getting more and more enraged. Watching these women and children being murdered. He knew he couldn't do anything until Wilma gave the order. Then all of a sudden, Wilma without saying a word drew her weapon from its holster, aimed it and started firing. Buck and Hawk took that as an order, so they too drew their weapons and started firing. They ran in to the village and split up going in different directions. The intruders seeing outsiders with weapons quickly left the village, leaving behind their fallen comrades. Buck, Wilma and Hawk joined up again in what appeared to them as a square. There a statue of an old human stood.

"Buck, Hawk... follow them, see where they go. I'm going to check on these woman and children, then I'll call for the medical team and back up," Wilma ordered with anger in her voice as she started down one of the small streets.

Buck and Hawk nodded and took off running in the direction the intruders left in. A little ways outside the village Buck and Hawk found one of the intruders laying on the side of the path under some foliage. Buck pushed the bush a side and seen that the intruder was dead. Hawk looking at the man could see that he was shot twice. Once in the leg, the other in the head.

"Maybe he couldn't keep up and they didn't want him to talk," Hawk said pointing out the wounds.

Buck nodded. "Could be...come on, we have to try to find out where they went," Buck said looking towards Hawk. Both stood up and started to follow the path again.

A short time later they came to a clearing. They stood for a moment looking out over the field. Not seeing any of the intruders they decided to start heading back to the small village to meet up with Wilma. Hawk soon noticed a slight movement in the bushes to his left. He drew his weapon, tapped Buck on his shoulder and pointed towards the bush. Buck, glanced over at Hawk seeing him with his weapon drawn, drew his own weapon. Hawk slowly and cautiously started to walk over towards the bush with Buck walking beside him. Hawk reached the bush a second before Buck did. He grabbed the bush and pulled it aside. There laying wounded was a female, holding her stomach. She was curled up on her side almost covered with branches and leaves. She was holding a small branch in her mouth. As much pain as she was in, she didn't utter a word. She glanced up and saw Buck and Hawk standing there. Her eyes grew big, but before she could scream, she clasped into unconsciousness. Buck crawled in under the bush and gently took the branch from her mouth and then carefully picked up the woman and handed her to Hawk.

"She's severely injured, we need to get back to the village to get her help," Buck said looking at the female.

Hawk stood there for a moment gazing at her. "She look like one of my people, but different," Hawk said with a puzzled expression on his face.

Buck watched as Hawk gazed at this female. "Hawk, we really need to go. She's hurt pretty bad," Buck said as he started to take her from Hawk's hands. Hawk turned away so Buck couldn't take her. All Hawk could see in his mind was Koori, her injuries and her death. Buck watched as Hawk's puzzled expression turned from confusion to concern. Buck tried to take the woman again, but again Hawk turned away.

"I'll wait here with her while you go get the fighter. She shouldn't be moved around that much," Hawk said placing her gently on the ground shielding her eyes from the sunlight.

Buck stood and started to back away. "I'll be back as soon as I can," Buck said as he turned and started running in the direction they came from. Buck ran as fast as he could to get to the village where

Wilma was.

Hawk gently moved her around a little so the sun didn't shine directly in her eyes. He started to look over her injuries, but for some reason his eyes kept going back to her eyes and face.

"Who are you? Where did you come from? You're one of my people, but in a way you're not." Hawk hesitated for a moment. "You must have been biting on that branch for a while to keep from crying out from the pain," Hawk said softly still looking at her face.

Her head feathers were as black as night, they didn't wrap around her neck as Hawk's people did. They laid flat down the back of her neck. Her eyes, instead of a soft white eye feathers, hers were as black as her head feathers. Her clothing was the same. She wore the traditional cream white with beads embedded on it. Her skin was a light brown, compared to the cream white of his people. Hawk sat there looking over this strange bird-woman.

Buck finally made his way back to the village. Wilma was directing the medical teams to the most severe patients. She noticed Buck running towards her.

"Where's Hawk?" she asked looking past Buck.

Buck stopped and was trying to catch his breath. "We found an injured woman, up the path a ways... She needs medical help right away. Hawk is with her," Buck said taking a deep breath.

"Buck, we have a lot of injured people here also. She'll have to wait until we can get to her," Wilma replied.

"Wilma..she looks all most like Hawk. Except she has black feathers," Buck explained.

"Like Hawk?" Wilma asked.

Buck nodded as he grabbed Wilma by her arm and started to pull her towards the path.

"How bad is she?" Wilma asked as she pulled her arm back.

"Bad Wilma... really bad," Buck replied.

Wilma could see in Buck's eyes that this woman really needed help at that moment. She called over one of the medics and informed him that there was an injured woman outside of the village and that Buck would

take him. Buck nodded in agreement.

"Wilma, it would be faster if we took one of the shuttles. She shouldn't be carried this far," Buck said.

Wilma nodded in agreement. "Take one of the shuttles, but hurry back. We need all the help we have here," Wilma replied.

Chapter 3

Close by an elderly woman sat being tended to by one of the medical crew, she slowly stood and hobbled over to Buck and Wilma.

"I heard you say you found a woman on the outside of town? Is she alive?" the elderly woman asked with concern in her voice.

"Yes, she's alive but badly injured," Buck replied.

"Please, you must care for her, she is the last of her kind," the old woman said before the medic gently pulled her back to him.

Buck walked back over to the old woman. "What do you mean she is the last of her kind?" Buck asked.

"Her people lived here in peace. They never came down to the city or villages until they needed supplies. They never harmed anyone and no-one ever wanted to harm them." The old woman hesitated with tears in her eyes. "Her mate and people were killed a while back. We found her just shortly after that. She's lived here with us since," the woman replied.

Buck gently placed his hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry, we'll take good care of her," Buck said trying to reassure the old woman.

The old woman smiled and seated herself again as the medic worked on caring for her wounds.

"What is her name?" Buck asked.

The woman glanced up at Buck. "Her name is Lela," she replied.

Buck nodded, turned and walked away. He informed the medic that was going with him, the general direction they had to go. They entered the shuttle and before long was air born and heading in the direction which Buck told him.

Hawk sat with his weapon drawn. He had picked up the female and placed her a little further under the trees, to shield her from the bright sun. He sat watching the field with his hand gently on her arm. He soon felt her arm move slightly. He turned his attention back to her. She slowly started to move her body, but soon stopped from the pain. She started to open her eyes, accompanied with a soft moan. She rolled her head a little to gaze at this creature who she'd never seen before. Her eyes grew big again. Hawk saw the fear in her eyes.

"It's all right, I'm not going to do you any harm," Hawk said softly.

"Who are you?" she asked softly.

"I am Hawk. My friend and I found you under those bushes, do you remember?" Hawk asked softly.

"Your friend is human?" She asked with fear still in her eyes.

"Yes, his name is Buck Rogers. We're from the research vessel Searcher. We were ordered to come here and assist," Hawk said turning his gaze back out to the field as if still keeping watch. He turned his gaze back to the woman. "What is your name?" Hawk asked.

She tried to sit up but Hawk gently placed his hand on her shoulder. "No, you must lie still. You've been badly injured," he said.

She gently laid herself back down. Hawk turned his attention back out to the field. She laid there watching him, as if studying him.

"My name is Le..." Was all she said before falling once again into unconsciousness.

Hawk started to gently shake her. "I can't wait for Buck to get back. I must get you help right away," Hawk said. He stood up and gently picked the woman up and started to walk out from under the trees when he heard the shuttle. He walked out into the field and watched the shuttle come over the tree tops.

"There he is!" Buck said loudly pointing down towards Hawk.

The pilot nodded an acknowledgment and started the landing process not far from Hawk. After the shuttle was on the ground, the door opened, Buck and the medic exited. Hawk still walking towards the shuttle, stopped and placed the woman gently back down on the ground. The medic arrived and started taking her vitals and examining her

wounds.

"We need to get her better medical help than I can give her. Has she been conscious at all?" he asked glancing up to Hawk.

"She came to for a few moments. Then she tried to sit up, I explained to her that she had to remain lying down. A moment later, she went unconscious," Hawk replied.

"That's not good," the medic replied as he stood and started running back to the shuttle. A moment later he emerged carrying a stretcher. Hawk and Buck gently picked the woman up and placed her on it. Together they lifted the stretcher and carried her back to the shuttle with the medic beside them. They entered the shuttle and strapped her down.

"Get us back to the village as fast as you can," the medic yelled out as he stayed by the woman's side.

The shuttle lifted off and headed back in the direction of the village. Wilma was assisting the medics in their job of caring for the wounded in the village. When she heard the shuttle she stopped and watched as it came over the tree tops and landed in the small field close to the village. She made her way over to it. The door opened and Buck and Hawk emerged, walking over to her in a fast pace.

"What's going on?" she asked with concern as she noticed the look on Buck and Hawk's face as they approached.

"The woman needs emergency care right away Wilma, she can't wait," Buck said glancing over towards Hawk who was standing by his side.

"How bad?" Wilma asked.

"Life threatening," Buck replied.

Wilma walked quickly into the shuttle followed closely by Buck and Hawk. She gazed at the woman who was still unconscious. She turned and faced the medic who was tending to the woman.

"Is it serious?" she asked.

"Yes. She needs better care than what I can give her. We need to transport her up to the Searcher right away," the medic replied.

Wilma nodded, she turned and walked up towards the front of the shuttle and called up to the Searcher.

"Col. Deering to Searcher.. we have a seriously injured woman that needs emergency care right away. Permission to transport her to the Searcher?" Wilma asked.

A few moments later.. "Searcher to Col. Deering.. permission granted. Will have medical team standing by awaiting your arrival.. Searcher out."

"Acknowledged Searcher.. Deering out."

Wilma turned and glanced back at the medic. "Take her up to the Searcher immediately. The medical team will be standing by." She turned and placed her hand on the pilots' shoulder. "Transport her immediately to the Searcher. After you've done that, return here," Wilma ordered. Wilma turned and looked at Hawk. "Do you want to go up with her?" she asked.

Hawk nodded and sat down across from the woman. Just as Wilma and Buck were about to leave the shuttle the old woman that had asked about the injured woman stood in the door way.

"Please.. may I go with her?" she asked with tears in her eyes.

Hawk hearing the request stood and walked back to the door. "Col. it might be wise to have her come along. The woman was frightened enough when she saw Buck and myself. Could you imagine how scared she's going to be when she wakes and sees all those humans gathered around her?" Hawk said.

Wilma turned her attention back to the old woman. "I understand how much you want to be with her right now. But once she gets on our ship, the doctor will be busy examining her and tending to her wounds." Wilma lowered her head for a moment then raised it again and looked at the old woman. "I think it would be best if you waited here, at least until the doctor had time to care for her," Wilma said.

The woman stood there with tears pouring down her face. Wilma started to walk away when Hawk quickly walked up behind her.

"Wilma please, let the old woman go with her," Hawk pleaded.

Wilma turned to Hawk. "I'm sorry Hawk. But it would be best if she stayed here. At least for the time being," Wilma replied as she walked off.

Hawk hung his head and slowly turned towards the old woman. "I'm

sorry," Hawk said as he walked back to the shuttle and climbed in. Buck not agreeing with Wilma's decision walked over to the pilot and made a call to the Searcher.

"Buck Rogers to Searcher."

"Go ahead Buck. What's the hold up on the injured woman?" Admiral Asimov asked.

"Admiral, the woman was very frightened when Hawk and I found her. There is a old woman here requesting permission to come on board the Searcher to help calm the injured woman when she awakens," Buck explained.

There was silence for a few moments. "Searcher to Buck Rogers.. permission granted... Searcher out."

"Thank you Admiral... Rogers out." Buck turned towards Hawk and smiled. Hawk didn't hesitate, he jumped up and ran out the door but he didn't have to go far. The old woman was just a few feet away from the shuttle. He stopped in front of the old woman and smiled.

"The Admiral granted you permission at come up to the Searcher. But, there's a chance you will not be allowed in the operating room while the doctor tends to her," Hawk said.

The old woman smiled and slowly turned around and headed for the shuttle. Wilma hearing what Hawk told the old woman walked back over and grabbed Hawk by his arm. "Who gave you permission?" she asked in a stern voice.

"The Admiral approved it Wilma," Buck replied walking up behind them.

"You went over my head?" Wilma asked.

"I'm sorry Wilma, but I think you made a wrong call on this one. That young woman is going to be scared to death when she wakes up. That old woman needs to be there to show her that we don't mean her any harm. Besides, if what that woman says is true. And that severely injured woman is the last of her kind. We have to do everything in our power to make sure she survives, right?" Buck asked.

Wilma nodded in agreement. She turned to Hawk. "I'm sorry Hawk. I'm just so mad right now at what happened here. Every person in this village is either a female or child. There's not one male here," Wilma replied looking around.

Hawk placed his hand on Wilma's shoulder and smiled. "Maybe the old woman could tell us why those humans attacked them," Hawk said.

Wilma smiled. "Maybe." She glanced over Hawk's shoulder then back to Hawk. "You better get going," Wilma said.

Hawk headed for the War Hawk. The door on the shuttle closed and the pilot started the engines. With in minutes, the shuttle was leaving the planet surface and heading for the Searcher, followed closely by Hawk.

Chapter 4

Buck walked slowly over to Wilma. "I hope she'll be all right," he said softly.

"So do I Buck. Did Hawk say where she might have come from?" Wilma asked.

"No. The way he kept staring at her, I'd say he's never seen her kind before. The old woman did say that her people lived here, but were murdered by humans," Buck replied as he turned and walked away.

"Just like Hawks' people," Wilma said softly to herself as she turned and followed Buck.

Hawk was about to approach the Searcher, followed by the shuttle.

"Hawk to Searcher."

"Go ahead Hawk.. this is Searcher."

"Searcher, requesting landing bay for shuttle," Hawk said.

"Shuttle, approach landing bay 1.. medical team is standing by," Searcher replied.

"Approach landing bay 1.. acknowledged Searcher," the pilot of the shuttle replied.

"Searcher to Hawk.. War Hawk approach landing bay 2... Searcher out."

"Landing bay 2, acknowledged.. thank you Searcher," Hawk replied as he started to guide his ship towards the landing strip.

Inside the Searcher, the shuttle had just landed and the medical team was walking quickly over to it. The shuttle door opened and they entered. A moment later Hawk landed his ship and was climbing out when the medical team emerged from the shuttle with the mysterious woman on a portable stretcher. The old woman was trying to stay with the medical team but was left behind. Finally the old woman reached the door that led into the interior of the Searcher. The door opened and she exited the landing bay only to find herself alone. The medical team was gone. She stood outside, frantically trying to find out which way they had gone, asking anyone she saw. They shook their heads and walked off. She leaned against the wall and started to weep softly. A moment later Hawk exited the landing bay. Not seeing the old woman at first, he heard the soft muffled cry. He walked towards the sound and found her. He slowly walked up to her and gently removed her hands from her tear stained face. She opened her eyes and looked up at him.

"I can't find her," she said weeping.

"I'll take you to her," Hawk replied as he placed his arm gently around her shoulder. He then placed his other hand under the elbow of her other arm. They began walking. Before long they stopped at the door to the sick bay. Her eyes fixed on the door that led into the sick bay.

"Will she be all right?" she asked not taking her eyes off the door.

"The doctor is a good man. He'll do whatever it takes," Hawk replied as he placed his hand on the control entry panel. The door opened with a whoosh. Hawk escorted the old woman inside.

Inside the sick bay the nurses were rushing about. Off to the side were three small exam rooms. Just as one nurse would leave one of the exam rooms, another would enter. Hawk turned his attention back to the old woman. He saw in her eyes the desire to be with the young female, and also her fear of losing her. Hawk walked the old woman to the corner, close to the exam room. He released her arm, and quickly found a chair and placed it next to her and assisted her in sitting. She kept a watchful eye on the exam room door.

"I'm going to talk to the doctor. I'll try to find out how she is and how bad the injury is. I'll also let him know you are out here for her," Hawk said as he started to turn towards the exam room.

"Thank you," she said softly.

Hawk walked over to the exam room door, only to be almost knocked

down by a nurse rushing out. The nurse placed his hand on Hawk's shoulder. "Sorry Hawk," he said as he continued over to the medical stand to retrieve more medical supplies. Grabbing the supplies he needed, he quickly walked past Hawk and back into the exam room. Hawk finally got a chance to look inside. Standing around the exam bed, Dr. Goodfellow and all the nurses were working frantically, yelling orders to one another. Dr. Goodfellow glanced up and seen Hawk standing in the doorway. He turned to the nurse standing next to him and said something. He turned away from the exam bed, removed his surgical gloves and walked quickly over to Hawk.

"How is she?" Hawk asked.

"Not good dear boy. I don't know how she survived an injury like that. But, if she'd just hold on a little while longer, I'm sure we can repair all the damages," Goodfellow replied.

"Doctor, this woman is like a family member to that young woman," Hawk said motioning towards the old woman.

The doctor turned around to see the old woman trying to stand. He quickly walked over to her and assisted her.

"How is she?" the old woman asked looking into Dr. Goodfellow's eyes.

"I'm not going to lie to you. Right now, we have her stabilized. But, as severe as her wounds are she could go down very quickly," Goodfellow replied.

The old woman turned to Hawk, then back to Goodfellow. "Please! You have to save her," she cried.

Goodfellow placed his hand on her shoulder. "I'll do the best I can," he said as he turned and walked quickly back into the exam room.

The old woman turned to Hawk. "What is your name?" she asked wiping the tears from her eyes.

"I am Hawk from Throm. What is the woman's name?" Hawk asked.

"Her name is Lela. She and her people came to Osjewelco from Falka many years ago," she replied as she sat back down and turned her attention back to the exam room door.

Hawk leaned against the wall next to the old woman. "Where is this planet Falka?" Hawk asked.

"It's in the Omaca System, next to the planet Crunos," she replied.

Hawk stood there for a moment. He turned his head and looked at the old woman. "Can you tell me what happened down there?" Hawk asked.

The old woman turned her gaze back onto Hawk. "It started several years ago. You might have noticed that there were no men in our village. Except for a few young boys and old men," the old woman said.

Hawk nodded. "I was wondering about that. Why did those humans attack you?" Hawk asked.

"They know there's a bird person living among us, but they don't know where. So about once a week they come in to the village and search for her. Only this time they attacked us. That was the first time they had ever done that," the old woman explained.

"Why do they want her?" Hawk asked.

"She is the last of her breed. You and her are alike in some ways. You both worship Make-Make. Some of your people have the ability to see into one's soul and talk by telepathy. But with some of her people it's the ability to heal. She's a healer," the woman said.

"A healer? What do you mean?" Hawk asked.

"She has the ability to heal others," the old woman said turning her attention back to the exam room door.

"But if she has these powers, why didn't she heal herself?" Hawk asked.

"She can't do that. She might be able to mend herself partly, but as for healing herself completely, no," the old woman replied.

Hawk watched as the old woman started to form tears in her eyes again. "Please... they must help her," she said as she started to cry openly.

Hawk turned and embraced the old woman. "Dr. Goodfellow will do everything in his power to help her," Hawk said softly.

Just then one of the nurses came running out of the exam room and over to the medical tray, grabbing what looked to be a very large hypodermic. Then running back in to the exam room, only this time closing the door behind him.

The old woman looked up to Hawk with a scared expression on her face.

"What's wrong? What's happening?" she asked with fear in her voice.

"I do not know," Hawk replied releasing the old woman and walking towards the exam room.

Just as Hawk got to the door, it opened and out walked Dr. Goodfellow. He stopped and gazed at Hawk then turned his attention to the old woman. "I'm sorry.." Was all the doctor could say before the old woman doubled over in her chair, she cupped her hands over her eyes and started to cry even harder.

Chapter 5

The doctor walked over to her and placed his hand on her shoulder. "I was going to say, I'm sorry but you won't be able to see her today, she's sleeping right now. She'll be fine, after a lot of rest. The damage was so severe, that we had to insert a hypodermic needle into her lungs to help her breath easier," Goodfellow said.

The old woman glanced up at Goodfellow. "You mean she's going to live?" she asked sobbing.

Goodfellow smiled and nodded his head. "She is one remarkable young woman. When I was doing the surgery I noticed that where the wounds were the deepest, they had all ready started to heal," Goodfellow said looking over at Hawk.

All Hawk could do was smile. Goodfellow looked back over to the old woman. "I'm going to ask the Admiral for permission for you to stay in one of the cabins across the hall. You'll be close by and I'll send someone to get you if she starts waking up," Goodfellow said watching the old woman's sobbing ease and a smile started to appear.

Goodfellow walked over to the ships intercom. "Sick bay to bridge," Goodfellow said glancing back at the old woman.

"Bridge here doctor. How is the young woman?" Asimov asked.

"She's going to make it. Admiral, the woman that came up with her is here with me. I'd like to put her in one of the cabins across the hall from the sick bay, in case the young woman wakes up early," Goodfellow asked.

"Permission granted. Doctor, is Hawk there with you?" Asimov asked.

Hawk walked over to the intercom. "Yes Admiral, I'm here," Hawk replied.

"Hawk, I know you want to stay with the woman, but I need you down on the planet with Buck and Wilma," Asimov said.

"On my way Admiral ... Hawk out," Hawk replied as he switched off the intercom. He walked back over to the old woman and knelt down in front of her. "The doctor will see you get anything you might need. I must go back down to the planet," Hawk said as he stood back up and started to walk towards the door.

"Thank you," the old woman said softly.

Hawk turned his head slightly, smiled and gave a quick nod of his head then walked out the door.

"The nurse will show you to your cabin," Goodfellow said motioning with his hand for one of the nurses. The old woman slowly stood and started to walk towards the door. She stopped in front of the doctor and smiled. "Hawk was right. You are a good healer," she said as she started to leave behind the nurse who was waiting by the door.

Goodfellow could only smile. After the old woman had left, he walked back into the exam room and kept a vigil eye on Lela. Hawk made his way to the hanger bay, climbed into the War Hawk and started the ignition.

"Hawk to Searcher."

"Go ahead Hawk."

"Requesting permission for launch," Hawk asked.

"Permission granted... bridge out."

"Thank you Searcher .. Hawk out."

With in moments Hawk's ship was speeding its way out of the launch tube and out into space. Down on Osjewelco, Buck and Wilma were overseeing medical treatment to some of the villagers. A couple of the security guards were tending to digging graves for the ones that had died.

"Did you or Hawk see where the intruders might have gone?" Wilma asked as she wrapped the arm of one of the villagers.

"No, we only found that one, and he was dead. Then we found the woman tucked under a bush in an open field. They could have gone in any direction from there. Why do you think they attacked these people?" Buck asked.

"I don't know Buck. The way these people look and live. I'd say they don't have any kind of riches. I'd say they might have been looking for something or someone." Wilma hung her head for a moment then looked up at Buck again. "But why did they kill that woman and her child?" she asked.

"I don't know Wilma. But if I know Hawk, he's going to want to find out. Especially since one of them was his kind," Buck replied.

"We can't allow that Buck. You know what will happen if Hawk takes matters into his own hands," Wilma said looking into Buck's eyes.

"I know, especially if she doesn't make it," Buck replied.

A few moments later, Buck and Wilma see the War Hawk approaching over the ridge where they landed their ships.

Hawk landed his ship and shut down the engines. He climbed out and started to walk towards Buck and Wilma. Looking at the injured women and children along the way. His mind kept flashing back to his village. Seeing his friends and family lying on the ground dead. Hawk stopped and looked at a young girl who was crying over her mother's body. Hawk hung his head and shook it in disbelief. "Why? Why these women and children?" Hawk asked himself softly. Hawk could feel the rage building up inside him, he closed his eyes, closed up his hands into fists and squeezed them tightly. "They'll pay for this!" he said loudly.

Buck walked over to Hawk. Seeing the anger in his face, Buck placed his hand on Hawk's shoulder. "We'll find who did this," Buck said.

Hawk looked at Buck with a gazed look in his eyes. "How could they do this to women and children? Why?" Hawk asked glancing over at the young girl with her dead mother.

"I don't know my friend. Come on, let's see if we can help anymore of these people," Buck said as he started to walk towards Wilma who was bandaging another woman's leg.

Hawk reluctantly followed looking back over his shoulder watching the burial detail gently lift the woman's body and carefully carried it to the burial site, followed by her crying daughter.

"Hawk, how is the woman?" Wilma asked.

Hawk turned his attention back to Wilma and Buck.

"The doctor said she'll make it if she gets a lot of rest. The old woman that came up with her is staying on board in case she wakes up," Hawk replied as he turned to watch them place her body into the grave. Hawk lowered his head and started praying in his ancestors language.

"Hawk.. Hawk? Did the old woman say why they attacked them?" Wilma asked.

Hawk raised his head and gave a light nod. "Yes, they were hunting for her, for Lela. They want her because she's the last of her kind, a healer," Hawk replied.

Buck and Wilma glanced at each other for a moment. "A healer?" Wilma asked.

"In my people, some have the ability to see into ones soul. With her people, there are healers. She has the ability to heal anyone that may become ill or injured," Hawk replied.

"So that's why they attacked and started killing these women and children? Because of her?" Wilma asked looking around at all the damage.

"The old woman said that they come about once every seven days trying to find her. She said that this was the first time they had ever attacked. The people here will not give her to them. They would rather die than betray her," Hawk replied.

"If they've been coming that long, why did they attack them this time?" Wilma asked.

"I don't know," Hawk replied.

"Buck, Hawk, I want you to take your fighters and scout the area. See if you can find where they went. Back track to where you found Lela and go from there. If you have to, search the whole planet. They couldn't have disappeared into thin air. They must be on this planet somewhere," Wilma said. Buck and Hawk nodded towards each other and headed for their fighters.

As they were about to climb in a injured young woman ran up to Hawk.

"Are you going to search for the Kalans?" she asked.

Hawk stepped down off of his fighter and approached the woman. "Is that what you call them, the Kalans?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, I wanted to tell you to search in the west, by the coast. There's a small city there. I've over heard them talking several times about it," she replied.

Hawk placed his hand on the woman's should. "Thank you," he said as he turned and walked quickly over to Buck. "That woman told me that she's over heard the intruders talking about a place on the coast to the west of here. Maybe we should check there first," Hawk said.

"Good idea, if these people are as devoted to Lela as much as the old woman said they are. They should want to help. Did she say anything else?" Buck asked.

"No," Hawk replied.

"Well, let's go check this place out," Buck replied as he closed the hatch to his fighter.

Hawk made his way back to the War Hawk and climbed in, closing the hatch. With in a few moments Buck and Hawk were heading west.

Chapter 6

A short time later both fighters reached the coast. Surprised to find that they didn't need clearance to land. Buck flew his fighter over the main part of the city. Hawk, being a little more cautious flew the War Hawk over the city at a higher altitude, casting a giant shadow over the city in the form of a bird of prey. People in the city gazed up to see what was casting the shadow, only to see the outline of a giant bird. Buck was first to land in a small clearing between the city and the coastline, followed by Hawk. They climbed out of their fighters simultaneously and walked towards one another.

"This isn't going to be easy trying to find those men who attacked that village in this large city. I guess we'll have to keep our eyes and ears open," Buck said glancing over at Hawk.

"Keep our ears open?" Hawk asked looking a little puzzled.

Buck smiled and placed his hand on Hawk's shoulder. "It's a figure of speech where I came from. It means, to listen carefully to everything that's being said around us," Buck replied.

"Why can't you humans just say, listen to everything being said?" Hawk asked shaking his head.

Buck smiled and pointed in the direction of the city. "Let's see what we can find out," Buck said as they started to walk towards the city.

As they entered the outskirts of city, the first thing Hawk and Buck noticed were that the people lived in small run down buildings with little or no walls. It looked like half of the homes didn't even have a roof on the buildings. Their clothes were torn and ragged. The children played on a filth layered road. Almost all of them looked malnourished. Buck and Hawk stopped and saw a small child walking towards them pulling his little sister with him. The child stopped in front of them.

"Do you want to buy my sister? She'll be a good worker when she gets older. She'll work very hard for you," the boy said.

Hawk and Buck turned and faced one another with a shocked expression on their face. They turned and looked at the boy again.

"Why do you want to sell your sister?" Hawk asked as he knelt down.

"Our mother and father said there are too many mouths to feed. So I wanted to sell my sister so we can all eat," the boy replied.

"How old are you?" Buck asked.

"I'm eight years old. My sister here is five. Then my older brother is twelve and my older sister is fifteen," the boy replied.

"And your parents want you to sell your little sister so they can eat?" Hawk asked.

The boy shook his head in a negative manner. Buck and Hawk turned to one another again and shook their heads.

"Where are your mother and father?" Buck asked looking around.

"They're at work, in the fields. They work all day. They won't be home until about sunset," the boy replied.

"What do they do with the money they get for working?" Hawk asked.

"They buy as much food as they can. But, it's not enough for all of us," the boy replied hanging his head.

"Do you really want to sell your sister?" Buck asked.

"No, I love my little sister," the boy replied.

"Where's your older brother and sister?" Hawk asked.

"They're working in the fields also. They go to work at sunrise and come home about sunset," the boy said.

Buck smiled and patted the boy on his shoulder. "Who is in charge in the city?" Buck asked.

"We don't really have anyone in charge. We have three guardians who keep the peace here. One lives on that mountain in a cave." The boy pointed towards a mountain to the south. "Then the others live in caves up on their mountains to the north and east," the boy said.

"Why do they live up there in caves instead of in town?" Hawk asked.

"Haven't you ever seen our guardians?" the boy asked cocking his head to one side.

"No, we're new here. Why? What do they look like?" Buck asked with a curious look on his face.

"They kind of look like very large birds with a long tail and long neck to me," the boy replied.

"Big birds?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, they're tall and have really big wings. They fly around our planet and make sure no one is causing any trouble," the boy replied.

Buck placed his hand on the boy's back. "Take your sister home," Buck said with an understanding smile.

Hawk stood and glanced over at Buck.

"A giant bird? What kind of creature would look like that?" Hawk asked with a puzzled look on his face.

"I don't know my friend. Maybe we can find out more in town," Buck replied.

As they turned and started to walk towards the city, a giant shadow fell over them. They looked up and all they could see was an outline of a creature that looked like a giant bird. They stood and watched it glide effortlessly over head. Then with one more flap of its wings, it was gone from sight.

"That must have been one of the guardians the boy was talking about. In a way it looked like something from my old Earth. But, that can't be possible. They died out millions of years ago," Buck said with a puzzled expression on his face.

"What did it look like? That creature you were just talking about," Hawk asked.

"Never mind. It's impossible. Let's get to the city and see what we can find out," Buck replied.

Buck and Hawk made their way in to town. Being surprised that no one paid any attention to them as they walked about. They came up on an older gentleman looking at some fruit at a stand, just outside of a small store.

"Excuse me sir. Could you tell us where we might find some people known only as the Kalans?" Buck asked politely.

The older gentleman turned and faced Buck and Hawk with a look of fear on his face. "I don't want to get involved." Was all he said as he turned and walked away.

Buck turned to Hawk. "He looked like he was too scared to tell us anything. Maybe these Kalans have some pull in this city," Buck said.

Buck and Hawk walked through out the city asking about everyone they came across. Some gave the same response, while others just walked off quickly. But, they all had the same look on their faces, the look of fear. When night fell, the city streets became completely deserted. Buck and Hawk had just started to walk back to their fighters when a young woman appeared in an alley-way.

"You are looking for the Kalans?" she whispered.

Buck and Hawk walked over to her. "Yes, do you know where we might find them?" Buck asked.

"They are not from here. That is why the guardians can not find them. Today in the square, you asked people where they were at. They ran

or were silent, right?" she asked.

"Yes. Why are your people so frightened of them?" Hawk asked.

"They came from the outside of the city to look for a woman. A bird woman like yourself. They want her, for reasons not known to me. They say if we turn over the woman, the attacks will stop," the woman said.

"Earlier today, they attacked a village not far from here. They killed some the woman and children there. We found the bird woman. She's now up on our ship being tended to by the doctor," Hawk replied.

"She lives?" the woman asked with a sigh of relief in her voice.

"Yes, she's alive and doing well. Please if you can, tell us all you know about these Kalans and these guardians," Hawk asked.

The woman looked around and motioned for them to follow. "I must not be seen talking to you. If the Kalans find out, they will kill me." She hesitated for a moment "Follow me, I know a safe place to talk," she said as she turned and started to walk down the alley.

Buck and Hawk followed the woman to a small shack at the other end of the alley. She glanced around then opened the door, motioning for them to enter. After they entered, she followed closing the door behind her. She made her way over to a small old wooden table, picked up and lit a candle, placing it back down on table. She then walked around and closed all the ragged curtains.

"Now we may talk," she said.

"Why are you and these people afraid of the Kalans?" Buck asked.

"Many years ago, Lela and her people came to this planet. They never did no harm to anyone. In fact, if any one here became ill or injured, it was always one of them to come down off the mountain to heal them. We never asked them for help. We never sent anyone up the mountain to get them. They always knew. Then one day, the Kalans came..." She hung her head and tears started to form.

"Please, tell us the rest," Hawk said softly.

The woman looked up at Hawk and Buck. "They started killing everyone of them, for no reason," she said weeping.

Hawk and Buck glanced over at one another. "Just like on Throm," Hawk

said.

Buck nodded.

"Please continue," Buck said.

The woman glanced up at Buck. "That was when the guardians appeared. We don't know where they came from. Or how long they've lived on this planet. All I know is what the legend says. That the day evil comes to Osjewelco the guardians will awaken and seek out the bringers of death. We have seen the guardians shadows flying overhead looking for the Kalans. But the Kalans disappear after each attack," the woman replied.

"Who or what are these guardians we keep hearing about?" Buck asked.

The woman looked over at Buck. "They are just...guardians," she replied.

"Have you ever seen these guardians? Can you tell us what they look like?" Buck asked.

The woman shook her head. "No, I have not seen them. Only the shadow they cast over the city when they fly over it," the woman replied.

"They? Are there more than one?" Hawk asked.

The woman turned and faced Hawk. "Yes, there are three of them," she replied.

Buck and Hawk started to walk towards the door. "Thank you for your help, we should go. We don't want anyone to know you helped us," Buck said.

"You must climb the south mountain. The guardian there might be able to help you," she said softly as they were about to open the door.

Buck and Hawk left quietly and quickly as to not draw attention to the woman's home. As they headed for the outside of the city where the fighters were hidden. Buck stopped and turned to Hawk.

"We'll start up the mountain in the morning. We have to get back to the fighters and report in to the Searcher," Buck said.

Hawk nodded. They walked quietly back to the fighters and made camp. Buck called up to the Searcher and informed the Admiral what they had found out and about the guardians.

"Permission granted. But use caution. We don't know these guardians and they do not know us. They might think of us as a threat," Asimov said.

"Understood Admiral... Buck out."

The next morning Buck and Hawk started to climb the south side of the mountain. Amazingly there was a small but narrow path leading almost all the way to the top.

Chapter 7

As Hawk and Buck approached the top of the mountain, they came across a large cave opening. They glanced over at one another and slowly entered, stopping just inside to allow their eyes to adjust to the darkness. They continued walking deeper into the cave. Up ahead they could see a flickering of light. They slowly walked towards it. As they got closer, a shadow darted past the opening. Buck and Hawk stopped and drew their weapons for the first time on this planet. Moving more cautiously, they continued walking towards the flickering light. As they approached the chamber which the light was coming from, they found it opened up into a much larger cavern. Lit torches lined the walls about every ten feet. They walked into the center of the cavern, and could see another large opening on the other side. With weapons still drawn, Buck and Hawk started to walk towards it.

Then out from the darkness.

"Who has entered this dwelling?" a voice asked.

Buck and Hawk stopped cold and circled one another, searching the cavern, trying to find where the voice came from.

"I ask again. Who enters this dwelling?" the voice asked again.

Buck and Hawk turned to the opening and saw a pair of yellow eyes glowing in the dark.

"My name is Buck Rogers, this is Hawk. Someone in the city told us that maybe the guardian who lives here might be able to help us," Buck replied.

"I am the one they call Ghost." The voice hesitated. "You are not from here. What is it you want?" the voice asked.

Buck and Hawk stepped forward a few steps and placed their weapons back into their holsters. "We are looking for some people called the Kalans. They attacked and murdered some women and children in a small village not far from here. They were searching for a bird woman named Lela," Buck explained.

"Lela? Is she alive?" the voice asked in a worried tone.

"She is," Hawk replied.

A moment later Ghost slowly came out from the dark. He stood straight up and stretched out his wings. Buck stood there amazed at the site. Ghost threw his head back and let out a roar. His wing span was about eighteen feet in width, he stood about twelve feet tall from ground to shoulders. On top of his head were two horns that looked about ten inches long. Ghost folded his wings back down like a large bird and started to walk towards them. Buck, not sure of what to make of it backed up a few steps. Hawk stood his ground with a smile on his face.

"You, feathered one. You do not fear me?" Ghost asked walking up to Hawk.

"No. I do not fear a brother," Hawk replied.

"Brother? I have not been called brother for a very long time. Why do you call me brother?" Ghost asked looking Hawk in the eyes.

"We are the same, you and I," Hawk replied.

Ghost and Hawk stared into each others eyes for a long time. Finally Ghost broke his eye contact with Hawk.

"You are a guardian, a protector as I am," Ghost said raising his head up once again. Ghost looked over towards Buck. Who was still amazed to see this creature that had been extinct on Earth millions of years. "You are his brother, yet you do not look the same," Ghost said.

"We are brothers not by blood, but by friendship," Hawk replied.

Ghost slowly turned and started walking back to the large opening. "You are his brother, you are my brother also. Come," Ghost said as he walked back in to the cavern.

Hawk and Buck glanced at one another then followed. Inside the other cavern standing tall were the other guardians. Ghost walked over and

stood beside them. Hawk and Buck stood before them.

"These are our brothers. They too are hunting for the Kalans. Our healer's village has been attacked and Lela has been injured," Ghost announced.

"I am Nemna, is Lela well?" Nemna asked.

Hawk stepped forward. "She was badly injured, but she will live," Hawk replied.

"We knew of the attack on Lela's village. We have searched for these attackers since it happened, with no prevail. Why do you seek them?" Nemna asked.

Buck stepped forward a few steps. "We are from the Research Vessel Searcher. We came to your planet only to investigate a report of a disturbance. We came upon Lela's village as the Kalans were attacking. We followed them to a clearing not far from the village, but lost them. That is where Hawk and I found Lela," Buck replied.

The guardians glanced at one another. "What will you do with the Kalans, if you find them?" the third guardian asked.

"That will be up to you or who ever is in charge of Osjewelco," Buck replied.

Finally the third guardian came out from the dark. His skin was faded grey and wrinkled.

"I am Mathayis, leader of the guardians. You may stay and assist in finding the attackers. But, when and if you find them you must bring them before us. Is that understood?" Mathayis asked.

"We understand and will do as you ask," Hawk replied.

"It is getting late. You are welcome to stay in the outer chamber, if you like. It is time for us to feed," Mathayis said.

"Thank you," Hawk replied.

Ghost, Mathayis and Nemna took turns flapping their wings as each left the cavern, with in moments all three were gone. Buck and Hawk turned around and left the inner chamber.

"I can't believe what I just saw," Buck said.

Hawk turned his head and looked at Buck "What?" Hawk asked.

"The guardians.. they've been extinct on Earth for millions of years. Now to find three of them here, alive and living on this planet. It's amazing," Buck said with excitement in his voice.

Hawk stood looking at Buck. "Why does that surprise you?" Hawk asked.

Buck looked at Hawk. "They are not suppose to be alive." Buck hesitated. "Hawk, these guardians and their kind lived on Earth millions of years ago. They were considered myths by some and worshiped by others," Buck said.

"You mean man didn't have a chance to kill them off?" Hawk asked with a bitter tone in his voice.

Buck glanced over at Hawk with a surprised look on his face. But he understood why Hawk said it. "Hawk, these guardians lived before and at the beginning of man. They ruled the skies back in their time," Buck said.

Hawk walked over to the opening of the inner cavern and sat down against the wall. "We should get some rest," Hawk said as he closed his eyes.

Buck stood there for a moment then sat down on the other side of the opening. "I can't believe they are still alive," Buck said softly to himself. Shortly after, Buck drifted off to sleep.

The next morning Buck opened his eyes to see one of the guardians standing before Hawk. He wasn't saying a word, just staring. Hawk in return was staring back. Buck slowly stood and started to walk slowly towards Hawk and the guardian. But before he got to them the guardian raised his head and nodded towards Hawk.

"I will do as you ask," Hawk said.

The guardian turned and with one flap of his giant wings flew out of the cavern. Buck walked closer to Hawk.

"What did you mean by, I'll do as you ask? I didn't hear a word from the guardian," Buck asked.

Hawk stood and walked over to the opening of the cavern and looked out. "I have to gather a few things. Then we'll head for the fighters. I have to check on Lela for them," Hawk replied as he started to walk down the small narrow path that lead them to the cavern the day

before.

Buck followed closely. Not sure of what went on between Hawk and the guardian, he caught up with Hawk.

"What did the guardian ask you to do?" Buck asked.

Hawk glanced over at Buck, smiled and continued walking. They made their way back to the beach where they had left their fighters the day before and climbed into them. Within minutes, both were heading back out into space.

"Buck to Searcher."

"This is Wilma... Buck are you okay? The Admiral has been worried about you and Hawk. We haven't heard from you since yesterday. Is everything all right?" Wilma asked.

"Yes, we're fine. We're returning to the Searcher. We have to talk to the Admiral upon arrival," Buck replied.

"Understood. I'll inform him you're on your way back. Is there anything else?" Wilma asked.

"Wilma, how is Lela?" Hawk asked.

"I haven't heard anything Hawk," Wilma replied.

"I'll talk to you soon Wilma .. Buck out."

Buck glanced over to Hawk's ship. "Hawk, what did the guardian ask you to do?" Buck asked.

Hawk glanced over at Buck's fighter.

"Mathayis asked me to make something, that's all," Hawk replied.

"What did he ask you to make?" Buck asked out of curiosity.

"A harness," Hawk replied.

"A harness? Did he say why?" Buck asked.

"No," Hawk replied with a smile on his face. After a few more moments the fighters arrived at the Searcher.

"Buck to Searcher.. Requesting landing bay."

"Searcher to Buck.. Land in landing bay 4 and 6.. Searcher out."

"Landing bays 4 and 6.. acknowledged.. Buck out."

Buck and Hawk landed in their assigned bay and exited the hanger. They headed for the bridge to report to the Admiral about what they had found. As they walked onto the bridge they headed directly to the bridge meeting room.

"Well gentlemen, What happened down there?" the Admiral asked.

"When we arrived on the outside of a small village we heard weapons being fired. We went in to the village to find it was being attacked by some humans called the Kalans. On Wilma's orders, Hawk and I followed the attackers to a field where we lost their tracks but came across Lela, the woman in the sick bay. When we got into the city we talked to a woman that said that the guardians might be able to assist us in finding the Kalans. We went to up the mountain hoping to talk to the guardians," Buck said.

"And did you find these guardians?" Asimov asked.

"Yes sir, we did," Hawk replied.

"Well, will they assist you in finding these attackers?" Asimov asked.

"Yes sir," Buck replied.

Buck and Hawk started to tell the Admiral about the guardians.

Down in sick bay, the old woman had gone to her quarters to get some rest. Lela had started to stir. Dr. Goodfellow was sitting at his desk when he heard her soft moan. He stood up and walked over to her bed and watched as she started to open her eyes.

At first, her sight was a little blurry, but as her sight focused more she saw what looked like an outline of a human standing over her. She gasped and screamed. She sat up so quickly that the nurses didn't have time to grab hold of her to restrain her. She slid off the bed and started to back up into a corner of the room. She saw what appeared to be a small knife, she grabbed it and held it out as if trying to protect herself. Goodfellow tried everything he could think of to calm the scared woman down. Finally not having any luck he made his way to the ship's intercom.

"Hawk, report to sick bay immediately," the doctor said loudly.

The nurses tried to calm Lela down. She stayed close to the corner

with the scalpel held out in front of her. Her eyes locked on the doctor and the nurses. Just then the sick bay door opened and in walked another nurse. Lela seeing where the door was, started to walk slowly towards it holding the scalpel out in front of herself as a warning to the doctor and nurses.

She had her back towards the door as she backed up. Just then the door opened again and Hawk walked in. The doctor and nurse started to back off. Lela thinking that it was safe lowered the scalpel a little and started to turn around. As she did she came face to face with Hawk.

Her eyes still filled with fear seem to soften at the sight of Hawk. She lowered the scalpel completely. Hawk stood there for a moment then reached his hand out to her. She glanced back at the doctor and nurses then turned her gaze back to Hawk. She slowly raised the scalpel and handed it to him.

"They will not harm you, Lela," Hawk said softly.

Lela stood there for a few moments. "You know my name?" she asked quietly.

"Yes," Hawk replied.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I am Hawk. You were injured when the Kalans attacked your village. Do you remember?" Hawk asked.

Lela closed her eyes for a moment then looked back up at Hawk. "I remember my friends telling me to run towards the caves. I turned and felt a burning sensation in my stomach. I started to run but then my stomach was hurting so bad I found a small bush and crawled under it. Then I covered myself up with leaves and twigs the best I could. I remember I cried out in pain a couple of time. I picked up a branch and bite down on it every time the pain got worse. I remember you and a human finding me. That's all I remember," Lela said.

Doctor Goodfellow walked slowly over to Hawk and Lela. Lela still frightened, backed up and stood next to Hawk as if wanting him to protect her from this human.

"This is Dr. Goodfellow. He will not harm you. He's the one that has been taking care of you since we brought you on board," Hawk informed her.

"Hawk, maybe Lela would feel more comfortable if she had a friend of hers with her," Goodfellow said glancing towards the door.

"Lela, a friend of yours came up here with you. I would like you to sit on this bed while I go get her," Hawk said.

"A friend? Who?" Lela asked confused.

Hawk smiled, walked Lela over to her bed and helped her into it, he turned and walked out the door. A moment later the door opened and Hawk escorted in the old woman.

"Lela!" the old woman shouted as she walked over to Lela.

"Mayra!" Lela replied with excitement in her voice as they embraced one another.

Chapter 8

Goodfellow walked over and stood next to Hawk.

"All right my dear, you must get back into bed and rest. I don't want those wounds to open up." Goodfellow turned to Mayra. "You may stay with her if you'd like. But she must stay in bed," Goodfellow said.

"You heard the doctor, you must rest," Mayra said trying to help Lela back into bed.

Lela turned to Hawk. "You never did answer my question. How did you know my name?" Lela asked.

"I told him," Mayra replied.

Just then the sick bay door opened and Buck entered. He slowly walked over and stood next to Hawk.

"How is she doing?" Buck asked.

"She'll make a full recovery, if she does what the doctor says," Goodfellow said jokingly.

Lela smiled and slowly pulled her legs up onto the bed and covered up. "You are the one called Buck?" Lela asked softly.

"Yes, how are you feeling?" Buck asked smiling.

"I feel much better, thank you. Hawk tells me it was you who also

found me," Lela said.

"It was Hawk who heard you under the bushes. So I guess you can say it was him who actually found you," Buck said.

"But, you are the one that went for help, right?" Lela asked.

"Yes," Buck replied.

"All right you two. You have to leave so Lela can get some rest. You can come back in a few hours to check on her, if you want," Goodfellow said.

"The doctor is right, you must get your rest. I'll be back later to talk to you. I must go speak to the Admiral about something," Hawk said as he turned and started heading towards the door.

"What do you have to speak to the Admiral about?" Buck asked, following Hawk.

"About a few things I need from the supply room," Hawk replied.

Buck stood there for a moment with a confused expression on his face. This was the first time Hawk didn't tell him what he was up to.

Hawk turned and smiled at Lela and Mayra. "I'll come back later. We have many things to talk about," Hawk said.

Lela smiled back. "I'll be here. I'm not going anywhere," she replied jokingly.

Hawk made his way up to the bridge. Upon entering, he was greeted by Wilma and the Admiral.

"How is the woman doing? Has she woken up yet?" Asimov asked.

"Yes sir, she woke up a little while ago. She'll be fine as long as she does what the doctor tells her to do and stays in bed," Hawk replied.

"Have you got to talk to her about what happened?" Asimov asked.

"No sir, not yet." Hawk hesitated for a moment. "Sir, can I talk to you in private?" Hawk asked.

Asimov glanced over at Hawk and could see by his expression that he really needed to speak to him.

"Of course," Asimov replied as he started to walk towards the meeting room. The door opened and they both entered. Asimov motioned for Hawk to sit. Asimov walked around his desk and seated himself.

"What is it, Hawk?" the Admiral asked.

"Sir, I would like permission to get some supplies from the supply room," Hawk said.

"What kind of supplies?" Asimov asked.

"Sir, while Buck and I were with the guardians, one of them asked me to make two harnesses. One for myself and one for another pilot," Hawk replied.

"What do you want two harnesses for?" Asimov asked confused.

"They want to help us find the Kalans. It seems that the Kalans have very good hearing and could hear our fighters coming from more than 2 miles away, which gives them time to hide. The guardian suggested I make the harnesses, one for myself and one for another pilot. Then we would ride on their backs to search for the Kalans. They make no sound while in flight, therefore the Kalans would not hear them coming. The guardians are determined to find the men that attacked and injured Lela and killed more than half of the women and children in her village. But they know they can't do it alone, they need an extra set of eyes, sir," Hawk explained.

Asimov leaned back in his chair and studied Hawk's face for a moment.

"You mean they want you and another pilot to ride on their backs?" the Admiral asked.

"Yes sir," Hawk replied.

"Who is the second pilot that you or the guardians requested?" Asimov asked.

Hawk stood up and started to slowly pace the floor. "It has to be someone that has experience in flying and who would feel comfortable riding on the back of one of the guardians," Hawk replied.

"I can think of several people who have the experience in flying, but feeling comfortable flying on the back of a dragon? That might take some time," Asimov replied.

"Sir, I know of only one person who has the experience and that could be trained quickly," Hawk replied looking towards the Admiral.

"Who?" the Admiral asked.

"Buck," Hawk replied.

"Buck? Are you sure he would go through with it? Let's say Buck doesn't want to do it, who would be your next pick?" Asimov asked leaning forward in his chair.

"I'd say that would be Wilma. She's an excellent pilot and she's strong-willed and tough. I think she wouldn't have any fear at all riding on the back of one of the guardians," Hawk replied.

Asimov leaned back again and rubbed his chin. "Do you want to ask Buck?" the Admiral asked.

"Yes, sir. But first, I must get started on making those harnesses," Hawk replied.

"All right Hawk, go get the supplies you need," Asimov said standing up and walking out from behind his desk.

"Thank you, Admiral," Hawk replied standing.

Hawk left the meeting room and headed for the supply room.

"Admiral, what did Hawk want to talk to you about?" Wilma asked.

The Admiral smiled and walked over to her. "Wilma, are you afraid of trying anything new?" the Admiral asked.

"Sir?" Wilma replied with a puzzled expression on her face.

"Are you afraid of trying something new?" the Admiral repeated.

"No, sir, why?" Wilma asked.

"I'm sure Buck will refuse to do what Hawk is asking. He has chosen you as an alternate," Asimov replied.

"An alternate for what sir?" Wilma asked.

Asimov smiled and walked back over to the control console. Hawk was about to enter the supply room when Buck caught up to him.

"Where you going?" Buck asked.

"Inside, I have to get the supplies I need to make those harnesses," Hawk replied.

The door to the supply room opened and Hawk and Buck entered. Hawk walked over to the small counter and waited for Henderson to walk over.

"Hello Hawk. Do you need something?" he asked.

"Yes, I need you to cut me off two pieces of the Akenan leather about six feet long each, four of the six inch "L" shaped steel rods, about eight feet of your strongest two inch line and two of the forty-eight inch steel rings," Hawk replied.

Henderson started to gather Hawk's order. Buck stood there with a strange look on his face.

"What is all that stuff for?" Buck asked.

"It's for the two harnesses that I need to make," Hawk replied looking towards Buck. "How do you feel about flying on the back of one of the guardians?" Hawk asked.

Buck looked over at his friend with a shocked look on his face. "What did you say?" Buck asked, wanting to make sure he heard Hawk right.

"How do you feel about riding on the back of one of the guardians?" Hawk repeated.

"Are you serious?" Buck asked.

"Yes, dead serious," Hawk replied.

"Are we going to be looking for the people that attacked Lela's village?" Buck asked.

"Yes. The fighters make too much noise. So Mathayis came up with this idea. Have two riders on the back of two of the guardians as an extra set of eyes. The attackers won't be able to hear the guardians flying over-head, which will give us a better chance at finding them." Hawk looked into Buck's eyes. "Are you up to it?" Hawk asked.

Buck thought for a moment. "When do we start?" Buck asked with a smile.

Hawk smiled back. "As soon as I get these harnesses made, we can go down and practice flying on their backs," Hawk replied.

"Why only two guardians? There are three of them. Wouldn't it be better if we had three extra sets of eyes?" Buck asked.

"I think Mathayis might be too old to try to carry a person on his back." Hawk thought for a moment. "But, maybe if that person is smaller and lighter, he might be able to," Hawk said.

"Smaller and lighter? Like who?" Buck asked.

"Wilma.. if she's willing to do it," Hawk replied.

"Remember the way she looked when those attackers murdered those innocent women and children? I have a feeling she'd do it in a heart beat," Buck replied.

"Do me a favor, take these supplies to your quarters. I want to go talk to the Admiral and Wilma about it and then go down and talk to Mathayis," Hawk said as he turned and started to walk out of the supply room.

He made his way back up to the bridge and found Wilma standing at her post. The Admiral was busy ordering more scans of the planet.

"Admiral, may I speak to you and Wilma for a moment?" Hawk asked as he walked over to Wilma.

The Admiral walked over and joined him and Wilma.

"Buck didn't want to do it huh?" Asimov asked.

"No sir, Buck wants to. But, he brought up the idea of having three riders instead of two. One of the guardians is very old and can't really carry too much weight. I was hoping with your and Wilma's permission, having Wilma ride the third," Hawk said looking over towards Wilma.

"Me? Ride what?" Wilma asked.

"On the back of one of the guardians," Hawk replied.

Wilma turned to face Hawk. "You mean, you want me to ride on one of those dragons?" Wilma asked.

Hawk nodded.

With in moments Wilma had a smile on her face. "I'd really like to help, Hawk, but I've never ridden on any thing like that before," Wilma replied blushing.

"Neither has Buck or myself. We'll go down to the planet and take some lessons close to the ground at first, then we'll practice flying higher." Hawk turned towards the Admiral. "That is, if it's all right with you, Admiral?" Hawk asked.

Asimov turned towards Wilma. "Do you think you could handle something new?" he asked.

Wilma turned towards the Admiral. "Yes sir, I think I can," Wilma replied smiling.

"Admiral, I'd like to go talk to Mathayis about it first. I want to make sure he'll be able to carry someone as small as Wilma," Hawk said.

"Of course in fact, take Wilma with you so he could see her," Asimov replied.

Hawk and Wilma left the bridge and headed for the hanger.

"We'll take the War Hawk," Hawk said.

They walked over to it; Hawk opened the hatch and assisted Wilma in. Hawk climbed in and started the engine.

"Hawk to Searcher."

"Hawk, this is Asimov."

"Sir, requesting permission to launch."

"Permission granted. Searcher out."

With in seconds the lights in the launch tube lit up and thrust the War Hawk out into space.

Chapter 9

Hawk and Wilma descended to the planet below.

"What are these guardians like?" Wilma asked.

Hawk smiled. "You'll have to see for yourself," he replied.

As they came over a small mountain ridge, Hawk noticed a small, flat plateau on top of the mountain.

"We'll land there and walk down to the opening of the cave," Hawk said, as he pointed to the plateau.

Hawk started the landing sequence and set the War Hawk down. He opened the hatch and climbed out, then turned and assisted Wilma as she exited his fighter. They started to walk across the plateau towards the edge. Wilma stopped in her tracks when she heard a loud roar and the ground beneath her feet started to shift. She grabbed a hold of Hawk's arm to steady herself. She looked over at Hawk.

"What was that?" she asked with a concerned expression on her face.

"That was one of the guardians," Hawk replied patting her hand in reassurance.

"Hawk, I don't know if I can do this," Wilma said nervously.

Hawk turned and looked into Wilma's eyes. "Wilma, ever since I first met you, I knew you were a strong and courageous woman. I saw the expression on your face when you saw that woman and child being murdered. I also saw the determination in your eyes to protect the people in the village and seek out their attackers. These guardians need our help as much as we need theirs to find the ones who did it." Hawk turned his eyes to the skies for a moment, then turned his attention back to Wilma. "Please Wilma, help us?" Hawk asked.

Wilma stood there looking into Hawk's pleading eyes. She glanced down at the ground for only a moment then looked back into Hawk's eyes.

"Let's go talk to the guardians," Wilma said softly.

Hawk smiled and gave a light nod. Together they made their way down to the opening of the cave. Hawk took the lead once they arrived just outside of the outer cavern and they proceeded in. As they began to enter the second cavern, he noticed that the torches were still lit on the walls. Wilma stayed close behind Hawk.

"Who enters this dwelling?" a voice from the dark asked.

"It is Hawk. We've come to speak to Mathayis," Hawk replied.

"Welcome Hawk, enter," the voice said.

Hawk and Wilma started to enter the dark cavern. Once inside of the second chamber, Wilma heard what appeared to be someone taking a long, deep breath. Then all of a sudden a blast of fire shot out and lit the center torch. There, standing on slightly raised ground stood Mathayis and Nemna. Ghost walked over and stood next to them.

"Welcome Hawk." Mathayis glanced over at Wilma and started to walk towards her. "Who is your companion?" Mathayis asked.

"This is Wilma, she's a protector, like us," Hawk replied.

"Welcome Wilma," Mathayis said.

"Thank you," Wilma replied smiling.

"Mathayis, Buck thought of something that might increase our chances of finding the Kalans. But, I wanted to talk to you about it first," Hawk said.

Mathayis turned his attention back to Hawk. "What is it?" Mathayis asked.

"It's about having three riders instead of two. Wilma is light and has no fear of living flight. Maybe she could ride on your back?" Hawk asked.

Mathayis turned and walked back to the others. "I'm afraid that would be impossible. It's not that I wouldn't, it's just that I can't. My strength is almost gone." Mathayis hung his head. "It's almost time for me to die. But, there are two others," Mathayis said lifting his head.

"Two others?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, one of them might be willing to carry Wilma," Mathayis replied.

"They? I thought you three were the only ones?" Hawk asked confused.

"No, there are two others. They will be the mates of Nemna and Ghost. Our kind will live on through them," Mathayis replied.

"Do you think one of them would carry Wilma?" Hawk asked.

"That, I do not know. You must seek them out in the high mountains to the south. You must ask them for help," Mathayis replied.

Wilma took a few steps forward. "How do we get there?" Wilma asked.

Mathayis looked over at Wilma. "You go south, across the seas. They wait on an island. But, the mountains are too high for you to climb," Mathayis said.

"We'll find them," Wilma replied.

Mathayis turned to Hawk. "Did you complete the task I asked of you?" Mathayis asked.

"No, not yet. We had to come and ask you that question first. When we return to the Searcher, I will complete it," Hawk replied.

Mathayis hung his head. "How is Lela?" he asked.

"She will live. When I last saw her, she was sitting up in bed," Hawk replied.

Wilma placed her hand on Hawk's shoulder. "Hawk, we must go find the other dragons. We're running out of time," Wilma said softly.

"Wilma is right, you must hurry," Ghost replied stepping forward.

"Wilma, you and Hawk came down in a ship, right?" Ghost asked.

"Yes, it's up on top of your mountain," Wilma replied.

"You must go get your ship and follow me. I'll lead you to the island. Hawk, though you have no harness ready, do you think you will be able to ride on my back?" Ghost asked.

Hawk smiled. "I would be honored," Hawk replied lowering his head.

"You must remember, lean with me in flight. If you don't, you will fall off," Ghost said.

"I will remember," Hawk replied.

Hawk turned to Wilma. "Wilma, do you think you can make it up the mountain?" Hawk asked with some concern for Wilma's safety.

"I'll take her up," Nemna said.

Wilma turned to Nemna. "I don't have a harness or a saddle," Wilma replied.

"I will be careful. It will take you a while to climb the mountain and every minute counts. It would be faster this way," Nemna replied.

Wilma smiled. Ghost, Nemna, Hawk and Wilma walked out into the outer cavern and then out into the sunlight on the ridge of the opening. There Wilma was able to see the true size of the guardians. The guardians lowered themselves. Hawk was the first to climb on to one of the guardians shoulders. Wilma glanced over at Nemna with a concerned expression on her face.

"Come Wilma, there is no reason to fear," Nemna reassured her.

Wilma walked over and placed her left foot on Nemna's front leg and swung her right leg over his lower neck. She glanced over at Hawk. Hawk smiled back and gave a light nod.

"See, it's not as bad as it seems," Hawk said smiling.

"Now Wilma, just like Ghost told Hawk, you must lean with me in flight. I'll do my best to stay on a straight flight. But, there are cross winds on top of this mountain, so if you must, hang on to my neck," Nemna said as he stood up.

Wilma's eyes grew big when Nemna stood. "I didn't realize they were this tall," she said looking down at the ground.

Ghost walked over to the edge and dived off, catching the wind currents about twenty feet down, he glided back up with a single flap of his wings.

"It's our turn Wilma. Are you ready?" Nemna asked.

"Yes, I think so," Wilma replied.

"Hang on," Nemna shouted.

Nemna walked towards the edge and dived off the edge. Wilma closed her eyes at first, then felt Nemna's powerful wings open up and give one flap. She opened her eyes and could see nothing but the blue sky and the back of Nemna's head.

"This is wonderful." Wilma thought. "Do I really have to take the fighter and follow you?" Wilma asked.

"Do you think you can stay on all the way there?" Nemna asked.

"I'm sure I can," Wilma replied smiling.

"All right then, hang on," Nemna answered.

Nemna caught up with Ghost and Hawk. Hawk glanced over at saw that Wilma was still on his back. "I thought you were going to bring the fighter?" Hawk asked.

"I changed my mind. Besides, this is great practice in case one of their mates is willing to let me ride on her back," Wilma replied.

Hawk smiled. As they traveled they looked around. They saw the ocean below them and birds flying alongside.

"How long before we reach the mountain?" Hawk asked.

"We should be there before dark," Ghost replied.

"So we'll have to stay the night there?" Hawk asked.

"No, we can return after you talk to the female. Our sight is better at night-time," Ghost replied.

Wilma shifted her weight slightly. "Is there something wrong?" Nemna asked.

"No, I'm sorry. I had to shift my weight because my back side was starting to hurt a little," Wilma replied blushing.

"I must apologize, I should have thought about my scales not being smooth or soft for you on this long journey," Nemna said.

"No, you don't need to apologize Nemna. It was my idea to travel the full journey on you," Wilma replied.

"It will be better after the harnesses are made. Maybe, Hawk will make you a saddle as well," Nemna said.

"Nemna, may I ask you a question?" Wilma asked.

"Certainly, what is it?" Nemna replied.

"I was wondering how you've managed to survive all these years?" Wilma asked.

"Let me explain. Every two hundred years or so, we mate with a female that was born to another. Just before the young come into the world,

we the males die. There has always been two females to mate with. And most often at least three to four males. Mathayis is old, he will not mate with one of the females. That is up to Ghost and myself," Nemna explained.

"What are the female's names? Or do they have names?" Wilma asked.

"The one that lives on the north side of the mountain is called Saphira, the other's name is Emerald. As you can see, we males are usually a dark color. The females are always a brighter color. Saphira is a blue dragon while Emerald is green," Nemna said.

Chapter 10

"They have beautiful names. Did they name themselves or did their mother name them?" Wilma asked.

"We dragons choose our own names. But, some times the parent will see something special in the offspring and give them a name to suit them. Like Ghost, with his off color his mother gave him the name," Nemna replied.

"Nemna, may I ask you another question?" Wilma asked.

"What do you want to know Wilma?" Nemna asked.

"Do you know why the attackers want Lela?" Wilma asked.

"We think they want her for her abilities. You do know she is a healer, don't you?" Nemna asked.

"Yes, Hawk found out from an old woman who assisted her up to our ship. Is she really the last of her kind?" Wilma asked.

"Yes, well at least on this planet. We have heard said that there are others on different planets. But since we have no way of finding out, we can only assume," Nemna replied.

Several hours later the island came into view.

"Is that the island where the females are located?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, we must circle the island first to show we mean no harm," Ghost said.

"Where is Ghost and Hawk going?" Wilma asked as Ghost started to go to the right of the island.

"We must circle the island first. We don't want them to attack us," Nemna replied as he too started to turn to the right.

They both started to circle the island. Up towards the top of the mountain, Wilma could see what appeared to be one of the females standing on a ledge outside of a cave. Her wings extended as if sunning herself. Her head turned as they flew past.

"That one is Saphira, right?" Wilma asked.

"With the evening light hitting her the way it is, I'm not really sure," Nemna replied.

They slowly approached the ledge where the female was standing. Ghost landed a few feet away from her, laying down to allow Hawk to dismount, then standing up again. A moment later, Nemna landed and did the same for Wilma. The female was Saphira. Her hide glistening in the evening light was a sky blue, her eyes a golden yellow. The two horns on her head were only about 10 inches tall, showing she was young. Wilma walked over to Hawk and stood next to him. Ghost and Nemna approached Saphira with what seemed to be caution, lowering their heads as they approached.

"Ghost, Nemna, what is it you want here?" Saphira asked.

"We have come to ask you for help," Ghost replied.

Saphira glanced over at Hawk and Wilma. "Who are they?" she asked.

"They are here to help find the Kalans. The Kalans attacked Lela's village and have injured her. Their ships are much too noisy to find the Kalans. Mathayis has asked us to allow them to ride on us, for our flight is swift and silent. But, Mathayis is old and weak to carry a person. He's asking you for your help," Ghost said.

"To ride on our backs? Why do these humans want to help?" Saphira asked.

"We are from the research vessel Searcher. We were informed that some of the people on this planet have been disappearing without a trace. When we came down, we were told to observe and report back to our commanding officer. But when we arrived on the outskirts of Lela's village, we saw the Kalans attacking her village and killing the women and children. We want to help find the attackers," Hawk replied.

Saphira slowly walked over to Hawk and smelled his head feathers. "You are like Lela. What is your name?" she asked.

"I am Hawk, this is Wilma Deering," Hawk replied.

Saphira glanced over at Wilma. "You are human?" she asked.

Wilma stepped forward a few steps. "Yes," Wilma replied.

"And you want Emerald or myself to allow you to ride on our back so you can find these Kalans, right?" Saphira asked.

"Yes, we need your help," Wilma said.

Saphira walked back towards the opening of the cave, threw her head back and roared so loudly that Wilma had to cover her ears. After she was done she lowered her head.

"I will talk to Emerald. We will let you know what we decide," Saphira said as she walked back into the cave.

Wilma turned to Hawk. "Is that it?" she asked.

"They will talk among themselves and let you know if they will help or not," Nemna replied.

"What do we do until then?" Wilma asked.

"We wait," Hawk replied as he sat down on a large boulder close to the opening of the cave.

Wilma sat down next to Hawk. She looked out towards the sky.

"Do you think they'll help us?" Wilma asked.

Hawk looked over at Wilma and smiled. "Yes, I think they will," he replied.

Nemna and Ghost sat on each side of the ledge, looking out over the island. Wilma stood and walked over to Nemna and gently placed her hand on his scaly neck. He turned his head slightly and glanced down at her.

"What happens to the females and the babies after they hatch?" Wilma asked.

"The females die about two to five years after the eggs hatch. The young males go into a deep hibernation until they are either full-grown or are needed. The young females will fly off and hibernate. They will wait until it's time to mate with a male later on or if they are needed," Nemna replied.

Wilma glanced up and smiled. "May I ask you something else?" she asked softly.

"I am 146 years old," he replied glancing back down at Wilma.

"How did you know what I was going to ask?" Wilma asked surprised.

"I saw the question in your eyes," Nemna replied turning his attention back out over the island.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of a loud roar coming from inside the cave.

"What was that?" Wilma asked glancing towards the opening of the cave.

"The females have made a decision," Ghost replied.

Hawk stood and walked out away from the opening. A moment later Saphira and Emerald both appeared.

"We will help. My sister says we shouldn't trust you humans for what they tried to do to her many years ago. But, I convinced her we should, due to the one called Hawk. What is the one's name that will ride on my shoulders?" Saphira asked.

Wilma walked forward. "I will," Wilma replied.

Saphira walked over to Wilma. "Let us go for a flight," Saphira said as she lay down beside Wilma.

Wilma nervously climbed on. Saphira stood for a moment, then laid back down. "You are with fear in your heart. I can not fly with you on my shoulders," Saphira said.

"Then let her ride on my shoulders," Nemna said.

Wilma climbed down off Saphira's shoulders and stood before her.

"Wilma rode on my shoulders all the way from our home. She showed no fear during the whole trip. She may ride on my shoulders, if she would like," Nemna said looking at Wilma. Nemna lay down and looked

over at Wilma again. Wilma walked over and mounted his shoulders as she had done before. Nemna stood, walked over to the edge of the cliff.

"Are you ready?" Nemna asked.

"Yes," Wilma replied.

Nemna stretched out his massive wings and dove off the cliff. Saphira, Emerald, Ghost and Hawk watched as Nemna and Wilma flew past them climbing higher and higher into the sky above the cave.

"I knew you had no fear," Nemna said glancing back at Wilma.

"I was just a little nervous about flying with Saphira for the first time," Wilma replied.

"That's what I thought. Do you want to try it again with Saphira? Or would you like to ride on me?" Nemna asked.

Wilma gently lay down on the back of Nemna's neck. "I feel safer and more relaxed with you," Wilma replied softly.

"So be it. The other rider may ride with Saphira," Nemna said.

Nemna started to head back to the cave where the others were waiting. As they approached Nemna let out a loud roar, but it sounded different this time. It was more like a rejoicing roar. The others made room on the ledge outside of the cave.

"She has chosen Nemna," Saphira said.

"How can you tell?" Emerald asked.

"The tone, it was different, the sound of rejoicing," Saphira replied.

Nemna landed on the ledge and Wilma climbed off. Hawk walked over to Saphira.

"Wilma has no fear in her heart. She was nervous about flying with you for the first time," Hawk said looking up at Saphira.

"Maybe we were both a little nervous," Saphira replied glancing down at Hawk.

Wilma walked over to Hawk with a smile on her face.

"Wilma, I was wrong about your fear. I would like it very much if we could try it again. I think we are both a little nervous," Saphira said.

"Go ahead Wilma," Nemna said.

"But, I .." Was all Wilma said before Saphira interrupted her.

"I know you have chosen Nemna to fly with. But, I would still like a chance," Saphira replied.

Wilma smiled. Saphira lay back down again and Wilma climbed on with no hesitation this time. Saphira stood and walked slowly over to the edge of the cliff.

"Are you ready?" Saphira asked.

"Yes, I'm ready," Wilma replied.

With that Saphira opened up her wings and dove off the cliff. They dropped down about fifty feet then leveled out.

"Are you alright?" Saphira asked.

"Yes," Wilma replied chuckling.

"You are light, I almost forgot you were up there," Saphira said.

Saphira flapped her giant wings once more and shot past the ledge where Hawk and the others were standing and watching.

Hawk walked slowly over to Emerald. "What did Saphira mean by what humans did to you a while back?" Hawk asked.

"Several years ago, my sister and I went out for a flight to hunt for food. We found some deer in a field grazing on the tender green grass. We each flew down and picked one up and then flew over to another field not far from where we got them. As we were feeding on our catch, some hunters came up. We never had any fear of them, or they of us. So we ignored them and continued eating. Then, I felt a sharp pain in my right side, just above and behind my right leg. The hunter had cast a spear into my side." Emerald lowered her head.

"That was the first time I ever felt fear. I roared and Saphira saw what the human had done to me. She roared and used her tail to knock down some of the other hunters. But there were so many. If it wasn't for Nemna, Ghost and Mathayis flying over at that time, I'm afraid my sister or I would not be here," Emerald said.

"But you still live in peace with all those humans," Hawk replied.

"Yes, it is our destiny to protect them," Emerald replied looking out over the sea.

"Tell me, why do these humans want to protect Lela?" Emerald asked.

Hawk turned to Emerald. "Because, it is their destiny as well," Hawk replied.

Chapter 11

Back up on the Searcher, Lela's wounds were improving with every passing moment. The only time Mayra left her side was when Dr. Goodfellow ordered her to get some rest. When that happened, Buck gladly sat with her. They talked for hours on end about her people, the guardians and the Kalans.

"Lela, what can you tell me about them, the Kalans?" Buck asked.

Lela's eyes started to swell with tears as they always did when it came to talking about the Kalans.

"You know what happened to my people. My father and grandfather use to tell us stories about them and the guardians. How the Kalans use to feed off the blood of my people many years ago. Myself and the children always thought it was just a story to scare us to stay away from the water. Years after the story was last told, everyone forgot about it. Only a few still remember it," Lela said with tears in her eyes.

"Lela, I know it hurts you to talk about it, but we need to find out as much as we can about them. Where they live, what they look like, anything that might help," Buck said.

Goodfellow noticed the tears on Lela's face. He slowly walked over and placed his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Are you all right, my dear?" Goodfellow asked in a soft voice.

Lela looked up at Goodfellow, gently nodded then turned her attention back to Buck.

"You said that your father and grandfather always warned you not to

go near the water, why is that?" Buck asked.

"In the past, that's where most of my people disappeared from. Then as time went by, they started to disappear from the fields and even from their own homes," Lela replied.

Buck sat there for a moment in complete silence. "Lela, do you remember when the Kalans first attacked or took any of your people? The very first time?" Buck asked.

Lela thought for a moment. "The very first time it happened was about two years ago," Lela replied with tears swelling in her eyes again.

"Where?" Buck asked.

"It was near the pond, not far from the village. A couple of families were gathering herbs and vines. Their children were close to the water's edge playing. There was a loud splash, like someone jumped into the water. The parents turned to see who it was and..." Lela cupped her hands over her face and started to cry.

"What happened?" Buck asked, leaning forward in his chair, gently taking Lela's hands away from her face.

She looked up at Buck with tears pouring down her face. "All the children were gone!" she cried.

Buck stood up and sat on the edge of Lela's bed. He wrapped his arms around her to comfort her. Lela leaned against Buck's chest and cried.

"We'll find them, Lela. I swear, we will find them," Buck said softly.

Goodfellow ordered the nurse to go get Mayra. Within moments Mayra was at Lela's side, holding her, comforting her in a rocking motion. Buck stood, glanced over at Dr. Goodfellow. Goodfellow could see Buck's eyes were also swelling with tears, but he also saw the rage and anger in them.

"I'll be back," Buck said as he walked out of the sickbay. Buck headed straight to the bridge.

"Buck, what's wrong? Is Lela all right?" the Admiral asked.

"Admiral, is there anyway to get a hold of Hawk or Wilma?" Buck asked as he walked over to the communications console.

"Not right now. They're with the guardians on another island. Why?"

Asimov asked.

"From what Lela told me, our best bet on finding the Kalans would be watching the bodies of water. The village is close to a pond, that clearing where we found Lela is not far from a good-sized lake. And then there's the coast next to the city," Buck replied.

"Are you telling me, the Kalans might be living in the water?" the Admiral asked with a puzzled expression on his face.

Buck looked the Admiral straight in the eyes. "Yes sir, I believe they do, every thing Lela said points to that," Buck replied in a strong, sure voice.

"Our scanners can't penetrate below the water's surface," Asimov said.

"I know, that's why I was wondering where Hawk and Wilma were. Maybe, together with the guardians, we can come up with something," Buck replied.

"Buck, what makes you think they live in the water?" Asimov asked.

"Admiral, Lela told me the first time anyone disappeared was close to the water's edge, several years ago. She also told me that for a while that was the only place her people started to vanish from. Then they started to vanish from the fields and then from their own homes," Buck replied.

The Admiral, with a very concerned look on his face walked quickly over to the control console. "Put the planet Osjewelco on the main screen," Asimov ordered.

"Yes sir," Lt. Collins replied as he started to press some keys on the console in front of him.

With in seconds, the planet was up on the main screen.

"Locate Col. Deering and Hawk's ships," the Admiral ordered.

Again, with in seconds the monitor located the ships.

"Now, enhance the entire area from the coast to Lela's village," Asimov ordered.

Again, with in seconds the area was enhanced. Showing every waterway.

"Buck, do you see this?" the Admiral asked.

"Yes, sir, I sure do. The whole area is surrounded by water. It looks like they're sitting on a small island," Buck replied.

"No wonder no one has been able to find them. They have all sorts of places to hide," Asimov said.

"Admiral, I'd like permission to go down to the planet and locate Hawk and Wilma," Buck requested.

"Permission granted. But, you probably won't find them if they're still on that other island," the Admiral replied.

"Maybe not, but they'll return to the ships when they get back, and I'll be waiting for them," Buck said as he quickly left the bridge .

Buck made his way quickly to the hanger, climbed into one of the fighters and started the ignition.

"Searcher, requesting permission for launch."

"Permission granted, good luck, Buck," the Admiral said.

Moments later the lights in the launch tube began to glow and moments after that Buck's fighter was launched into space. He flipped a few switches and found on the scanner where Hawk and Wilma's ships were and headed for them. As he about to land he saw something moving rather quickly out of the corner of his eye. He turned his head to see what it was, but it had disappeared. He landed close to the other fighters, then he shut down the engines. As he was climbing out of his ship, he heard what sounded like water splashing. He walked slowly over to a small stream that led to a pond. Buck stood by some bushes on the bank watching, listening. His eyes scanned the water surface for any movement or ripples. After not seeing anything he turned and walked back to the ship. Climbing back into the ship, Buck pulled out his sleeping gear and food. He walked a short way from the ships and threw down his bed roll, then he began to build a fire ring. After he got a fire started he sat down and started to think about everything Lela had told him.

"That has to be it," Buck said softly to himself.

It was just about noon when Buck heard what he hoped was Hawk and Wilma returning. He raised his hand to shield his eyes from the noon sun. All he could make out was a large shadow flying over him.

"That has to be them," Buck said.

A moment later Nemna and Ghost landed just in front of Buck. Hawk and Wilma dismounted and walked quickly over to Buck.

"Buck, what's wrong? Is Lela all right?" Wilma asked.

"Lela is fine. She and I had a nice long talk this morning. She told me about the first attack on her people and where it happened." Buck walked over to Hawk. "Hawk, most of the attacks started by the water's edge, then over time they moved further inland. The Admiral ordered the planet up on to the screen on the Searcher. Guess what? This whole area sits in the middle of a water system. There's lakes or ponds everywhere. They live in the water, Hawk," Buck said.

"Are you sure?" Hawk asked.

"As sure as I am standing here," Buck replied.

Hawk turned and looked over the field. He then turned his attention to Ghost and Nemna.

"We have to get ready as soon as possible. I must leave and get those harnesses made," Hawk said, then he turned and ran towards his fighter.

Wilma walked back over to Nemna and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"It is you whom I want to ride with," Wilma said with a smile.

"So it shall be," Nemna replied.

Chapter 12

Nemna and Ghost leapt in to the air and with one flap of their massive wings, were gone from sight. Hawk turned to Buck and noticed that he had turned his attention to the small stream.

"What is it, Buck?" Hawk asked.

"While I was landing, I thought I saw something out of the corner of my eye. Then shortly after that I heard a splash. Hawk, we have to find the Kalans," Buck said.

"We will my friend," Hawk replied.

Hawk and Wilma headed back to their fighters, started their engines and lifted off heading back up to the Searcher. Buck gathered his gear, then made his way back to his fighter and climbed in. Starting the engines, he lifted off and started to head out to join Hawk and Wilma. He glanced down and saw what looked like a shadow in the water swimming close to the top, then it seem to disappear. Buck leaned on the throttle a little more and with in seconds had caught up to Hawk and Wilma.

"Hawk, did the guardians say what the Kalans looked like?" Buck asked.

"No," Hawk replied.

"Did you talk to the guardians about riding on their backs?" Buck asked.

"Yes, the female they call Saphira has agreed to allow you to ride on her. Emerald was a little hesitant at first, but I could understand why," Hawk replied.

"Why was she hesitant?" Buck asked.

"Some time ago, she and Saphira were eating and some humans approached. They didn't think nothing of it, then all of a sudden one of them pierced her hide with a spear, injuring her. Saphira used her tail to knock some of them down, but there were too many. If it wasn't for Nemna, Ghost and Mathayis flying over head at the time, who knows what would have happened," Hawk replied.

"They attacked the dragons? I thought the humans liked and cared for the dragons," Buck said with a confused expression on his face.

"Buck, you said when we first joined you that you thought you saw something as you were landing. What did you see?" Hawk asked.

"I'm not sure. It moved rather quickly, then I heard that splash. But, after I took off from the planet surface, I could have sworn I saw something swimming in the water just below me. The it disappeared," Buck replied.

"Do you remember what it looked like?" Wilma asked.

"I just saw the outline of it. But, the outline of it looked like the old Earth crocodile. Which it can't be, can it?" Buck asked, confused.

"Buck, you said earlier, that these guardians once existed on old Earth, right? Well, why not these crocodiles?" Wilma asked.

Buck glanced over at Wilma's fighter. "Yeah, I did say that, didn't I?" Buck asked, thinking of what he told Wilma earlier.

Suddenly he turned his fighter back to the planet.

"Buck, where are you going?" Wilma asked.

"I know of someone that might be able to shed some light on this. I'll be back as soon as I can," Buck replied as he leaned harder on the throttle.

Hawk glanced over at Wilma and Wilma glanced over at Hawk. Within seconds they both turned their fighters around and started to follow Buck back down to the planet surface. They caught up with Buck.

"What are you two doing here?" Buck asked.

"We're coming with you," Wilma replied.

"Buck, what do you have in mind?" Hawk asked.

"That woman we talked to that first night. I have another question for her," Buck replied.

"What question?" Wilma asked.

"If there has been any humans that have disappeared," Buck replied.

They soon arrived at the coastline just outside of the small city. They landed their fighters and started to enter the small run down community on the outskirts of town. The little boy that approached them the day before greeted them again.

"Have you seen my sister?" he asked with tears in his eyes.

"No, where did she go?" Buck asked as he knelt down beside the boy.

"I don't know. We were playing over there this morning." He pointed towards a small stream that flowed in to the ocean. "I turned around and she was gone. I thought she was playing hide and seek, so I started to try to find her. But I couldn't find her anywhere," the boy said as he started to cry.

"I want you to think really hard. Has any of the others disappeared

from the city or from here?" Buck asked.

"I heard a woman disappeared from the city a day or so ago," the boy replied wiping the tears from his eyes.

"We'll try to find your sister. Stay away from that stream and the ocean, okay?" Buck said.

The little boy nodded and ran off.

"This is not good," Buck said as he started to run towards the city.

"What's not good?" Wilma asked running alongside Buck.

"That little boy's sister disappearing. He talked to Hawk and myself when we first arrived here. The next person we talked to was a woman in the city," Buck replied running as fast as he could.

Hawk and Wilma stayed as close as possible to Buck. Buck headed for the small alley-way that he and Hawk had used when the woman helped them. He came to the small worn down house. He knocked, no answer. He knocked again, still no answer. Buck slowly glanced around and started to open the old wooden door. Buck, Hawk and Wilma slowly entered. They could see that something had happened in the house. What little furniture there was was turned upsidedown, the table where they sat at was broken into pieces. Buck turned to Hawk.

"They did this!" Buck said as he ran back outside.

"Who did this, Buck?" Wilma asked.

"The Kalans, somehow they found out she helped us that night," Buck replied looking up and down the small street.

Buck ran to the small house across the alley-way and knocked on the door. An older woman answered.

"Can you tell me where that woman that lives across from you went?" Buck asked.

The woman looked up and down the small alley-way, turned back to Buck and smiled. "Mountains," she whispered as she closed the door.

Buck turned towards Hawk and Wilma. "We have to find her," Buck said as he started to run back towards the coast.

Hawk and Wilma followed. Buck reached his fighter and within moments

was air-born and heading towards the mountains.

"Buck, there are a lot of mountain ranges here. How are you going to find her?" Wilma asked.

"This woman is smart. She's staying away from all water ways. There are natural springs in the mountains. She'll have plenty of drinking water, and no Kalans," Buck replied. Buck thought for a moment. "Where would be the safest mountain?" he asked.

Hawk thought for a moment. "The mountain of the guardians!" Hawk replied.

"But we didn't see anyone on the mountain when we flew back across it," Wilma said.

"There's some small caves towards the top. A perfect place to hide," Hawk replied.

"Of course, there's also a small pond on the top of the mountain. I saw it when Nemna and I flew over it catching up with Hawk," Wilma replied.

As they approached the mountain of the guardians, some movement caught Wilma's attention.

"There, on the plateau! I saw some movement," Wilma shouted.

"Where?" Buck asked.

"In that small clearing, close to the edge," Wilma replied.

Buck and Hawk looked down at the clearing they thought Wilma was talking about.

"I don't see anything, Wilma. Are you sure you saw something?" Buck asked still scanning the clearing.

"I'm sure I saw something. It was there only for a moment before disappearing in to the trees," Wilma replied.

"It has to be her," Hawk said.

"Lets hope so," Buck replied.

Moments later they set all three fighters down in the small clearing. Buck, Hawk and Wilma climbed out of their fighters simultaneously

and started running towards the trees where Wilma saw the figure run into. About fifty to one hundred yards in, Buck, Hawk and Wilma stopped.

"Where did she go?" Wilma asked looking around.

"She's close by," Hawk said.

"But where?" Buck asked.

A moment later they heard a soft voice coming from alongside them.

"I'm here," the voice said softly.

Buck, Hawk and Wilma turned their heads towards the direction the voice came from.

"Where are you?" Buck asked, walking towards some trees.

"Up here," the voice replied.

Buck looked up, and sitting on a large branch about eight feet up was the woman. She looked down at Buck and smiled. Hawk and Wilma walked over to where Buck was standing.

"Do you remember me? We came to your home a few nights ago. You told us to find the guardians," Buck said.

"I remember. I'm sorry I ran, but I was scared," the woman replied.

"Do you need help getting down?" Hawk asked, as he came in to the woman's view under the tree.

She shook her head and slowly started climbing down. As she stepped on the last tree branch, she sat down.

"I think you should move," she said, motioning for Hawk and Buck to move.

Hawk and Buck took a few steps back and watched as the woman jumped down. She stood up straight and started brushing herself off.

"How did you get up there so fast?" Wilma asked.

The woman looked over at Wilma. "If you're scared enough, you can do anything," she replied with a smile.

Chapter 13

Wilma smiled and gently nodded. A few moments later, the woman calmed down and turned toward Buck.

"What happened? Why did you leave your home and why was it torn apart?" Buck asked.

"Shortly after you and your friend left. I heard some noise coming from the alley. I blew out the candle and peeked outside. I saw three men walking quickly towards my home. I didn't know who they were, so I climbed out of the bedroom window and ran as fast as I could to a friend's home down the street. She told me that the safest place would be up on the mountain. I knew you'd probably come back, so I had her tell my neighbor across from me to just say one word to you if you came there. That word was "mountain" I didn't want to endanger her either. I started to make my way up the mountain during the middle of the night. I heard something behind me, so I tried to climb even faster. I got about half way up when one of the guardians flew over. I called out as loud as I could, but I didn't think it heard me. I started to climb again, but then all of a sudden it was standing in front of me. I told him what had happened and he told me that I'd be safe here on the mountain," the woman said.

"Did you notice anything about those men that came to your home that evening?" Buck asked.

"Yes, it's what scared me the most. Their eyes.. they were glowing," the woman replied.

"Glowing?" Hawk asked.

"Yes, at first I thought it might have been the way the light was hitting them. But then when the light was not on them anymore, they still glowed," the woman replied.

"Are you sure you'll be okay up here?" Wilma asked.

"Yes, I found a small cave in the side of the mountain, not far from here," she replied.

"Good, stay there. Don't go down to the town for anything. When we went through that small village on our way to your house, a small boy said his baby sister was missing. She was close to the water's edge when she disappeared. Do you know if any of the people in the city

disappeared?" Buck asked..

"A little girl?" The woman hung her head for a moment then looked up at Buck and Hawk again. "I know of at least three maybe four people who have disappeared the past few weeks," the woman replied.

"We have to go back up to our ship and get ready to help the guardians," Hawk said placing his hand on the woman's shoulder.

"You found the guardians?" she asked with excitement in her voice.

"Yes, we've talked with them and we've come up with a plan to find the Kalans," Buck replied.

"We have to leave for a while. We'll be back soon," Buck said, as he turned and started to walk towards his fighter.

Hawk and Wilma smiled at the woman and gave a light nod. They ran to catch up with Buck, who was already climbing in to his fighter. Before long, all three fighters were on their way back up to the Searcher.

"Hawk, how long will it take you to make those harnesses?" Buck asked.

"Not long, why?" Hawk asked.

"Every minute delays our search for the Kalans," Buck replied.

"Buck, Hawk and I could ride with out a harness. We've riden on their backs for hours. Hawk's time has just been reduced to making only one harness," Wilma said.

"That's true Buck. I can have your harness made with in two hours," Hawk replied.

Buck nodded his head. "Okay, lets do it." Buck thought for a moment. "When we get back to the Searcher, we have to stop by the sick bay. I have another question to ask Lela," Buck said.

As they approached the Searcher, there was a call. "Searcher to Buck."

"Buck to Searcher, go ahead."

"Buck, your landing pad is number two, Hawk, yours is pad three and Col. Deering, yours is pad four."

"Buck's.. two, Hawk's.. three and Deering's.. 4. confirmed. Buck

out."

"Searcher out."

"Now that's service," Buck said chuckling.

Buck entered first, followed by Hawk, then Wilma. They landed in their designated landing pad, shut down their engines and climbed out. Buck walked over to the hanger chief. "We need all three ships re-fueled and ready to go with in two hours," Buck ordered.

"All three? It'll take at least six hours," the hanger chief replied.

"Six hours? We need to get back down to the planet as soon as possible!" Buck replied.

"Sorry Captain, but we have to let the ship's engines cool down before we can re-fuel," the chief replied.

"How about if you only have to re-fuel one ship?" Hawk asked, walking over to Buck and the hanger chief.

The hanger chief thought for a moment. "I can have one ship re-fueled with in two hours. As long as it's Hawk's ship. His ship has a strange cooling system on it, which cools the engine down with in thirty minutes, where ours takes a good hour to cool," the hanger chief replied.

"Do it," Hawk ordered.

Buck looked at Hawk. "Hawk, all three of us can't fit in to your ship," Buck said.

"No, but there are other fighters in here that are fueled and ready to go," Hawk replied, glancing around at the other fighters.

Buck looked around at all the fighters then turned his attention back to Hawk. "Good idea," Buck said smiling.

Buck and Hawk turned and walked away. Wilma stood by the doors, waiting.

"What was that about?" Wilma asked, as they approached.

"Just a little stratagy," Buck replied.

"You wanted to go sick bay and ask Lela something?" Wilma asked.

"Yeah, then go up and talk to the Admiral. That should give Hawk plenty of time to make that harness," Buck replied.

They left the hanger and headed for sick bay. The door opened, and they entered. Inside Lela was slowly walking around the room with help from one of the nurses.

"Lela, I have another question I need to ask you," Buck said.

Lela smiled, the nurse slowly walked her back over to her bed.

"What is it, Buck?" she asked, as the nurse helped her into the bed and covered her up with a small blanket.

"Lela, about what time of day did the disappearances occur?" Buck asked.

Lela thought for a moment. "The ones that I know of, occurred in the early morning or late afternoon," Lela replied.

"Did any of them occur during late morning or early afternoon?" Buck asked.

"No, never," Lela replied.

"Thank you Lela, that helps a lot," Buck said, as he turned and walked out of the sick bay. Wilma and Hawk stood there for a moment, both with a confused expression.

Buck headed for the computer room.

Chapter 14

Buck sat down at one of the computer tables and checked into the planet's natural inhabitants. On the screen appeared, humans and some non-dangerous creatures such as deer, rabbits, fish and birds. He then typed in the word "Kalans" but nothing appeared. He typed in the word crocodile. It showed a picture of the crocodiles on old Earth. He noticed the outline was the same shape as the shadow he saw in the water.

"How can that be?" he thought to himself. He started to read about the crocodile.

(Crocodile)

On Earth in the 20th century, there were 14 common species of large reptiles included in the family Crocodylidae (order Crocodylia) which also included the alligators and the gavia. Like all crocodylians, the crocodiles that remain are primarily distributed throughout the tropical regions of the world. Species occur in both saltwater and freshwater habitats. Crocodiles are generally omnivorous feeding on invertebrates, fish, other reptiles and amphibians, birds, and mammals—practically any animal they can overpower. A few, very narrow-snouted species are believed to subsist primarily on fish. Crocodiles are primarily aquatic and nocturnal, leaving the water only to bask by day or to build their nests. Some species construct burrows into the banks of rivers or lakes where they spend part of their time.

These animals are powerful predators with large teeth and strong jaws. Large adults of some species may exceed 20 ft (6 m) in length and are capable of overpowering and eating large grazing mammals, even occasionally humans. The webbed feet, flattened tail, and placement of the nostrils, eyes, and ears on raised areas of the head are adaptations for an aquatic existence. The raised nostrils, eyes, and ears allow the animals to float almost completely submerged while still monitoring their environment.

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Buck sat back in the chair and rubbed his hands through his hair. "If this is what I saw, how did they go unnoticed here for so long? If they really are crocodiles, why is it they're not listed in the habitats?" Buck asked himself softly.

"What are you reading about Buck?" a voice said behind him.

He turned quickly to see Wilma and Hawk standing behind him.

"I was reading about crocodiles," Buck replied.

"What's a crocodile?" Hawk asked.

"I'll show you," Buck replied. He pulled up the main file on crocodiles and clicked on the pictures. "This is what I believe I saw when I was taking off from that field yesterday," Buck said, pointing to the picture.

"Are you sure?" Wilma asked.

"I'm positive. It has the same outline I saw," Buck replied.

"What about the guardians?" Hawk asked.

Buck typed in "guardians" and nothing appeared.

"Maybe, guardians isn't listed because they don't want people coming to Osjewelco to hunt them," Wilma said.

"That's a good possibility," Buck replied.

"Turn it back to the creatures," Hawk said.

"You mean the crocodiles?" Buck asked, as he clicked back to the pictures of the crocodiles.

"Have you ever seen one of those up close?" Hawk asked, gazing at the pictures.

"I've only seen them in captivity. But there were reports of man-eating crocodilians in the Florida Everglades and in Australia," Buck replied.

"They must be huge to take down a full grown man," Hawk said.

"Not always, in some cases the crocodile might only be about 7 to 8 feet long and still have the ability to take down a deer or a human," Buck replied glancing up at Hawk.

"Do you really think this is what you saw?" Hawk asked.

"I'm pretty sure. It has the same outline and the same shape as the thing I saw in the water," Buck replied.

"Buck, are you sure you're spelling Kalans right?" Wilma asked.

"I'm pretty sure. But language has changed so much the past five hundred years, I could be wrong," Buck replied.

"Try spelling it, "K.a.a.l.a.n.s," Wilma said.

"I'll give it a try," Buck replied, as he started to type in Wilma's spelling of Kaalans.

Within moments a file came up on the screen.

"I'll be, there is something about them. Great job Wilma," Buck said, looking up at Wilma smiling.

Buck started to read the information on the "Kaalans."

"It says that the Kaalans come from a planet about two light years away. Their own planet was ravaged by a disease, some of them were able to leave, but most died. The planet was mostly water and some land. It says that the Kaalans, are an amphibious creature that feed mainly on fish, small animals and birds that came too close to the water's edge." Buck glanced up at Hawk and Wilma. "Like old Earth crocodiles." Buck turned his attention back to the screen and continued reading. "The Kaalans consist of a green luminous cloud of gas and are able to take the form of anything they come in contact with, animal or human." Buck turned to Hawk and Wilma. "That's why the woman saw the glowing eyes," he said as he clicked off the computer.

"They're kind of like the shape-shifters we found on Aggon 3 a couple of years ago," Wilma said.

"Yeah, but those shifters didn't eat people," Buck replied, as he stood and faced Hawk. "How long did you say it would take you to make that riding harness for me?" Buck asked with a concerned look on his face.

"I'm on it right now," Hawk replied, and he turned and walked out of the computer room.

"We need to let the Admiral know what we found out, then." Buck hesitated for a moment. "Then I need to talk to Lela," Buck said.

"Why?" Wilma asked.

"I can't believe I'm going to ask her this, but it's our only real chance of finding them," Buck replied hanging his head.

"Buck, you're not going to ask her to be the bait, are you?" Wilma asked, shaking her head.

Buck looked up and gazed into Wilma's eyes. "Yes," he replied, as he turned and started to walk out of the computer room.

Wilma quickly walked out behind him. She grabbed hold of Buck's arm and turned him around to face her. "Do you think Hawk is going to let you put a member of his people in danger?" Wilma asked.

"I told you, it's the only way to find them. She won't be in danger, we'll be there to protect her," Buck replied, pulling his arm away from Wilma's grip.

"Buck, there has to be another way!" Wilma said loudly.

Buck ignored Wilma and started to walk towards the bridge.

Wilma watched as Buck didn't even look back. "I can't allow him to put her in danger like that. I understand he wants to find them, but there has to be a different way," she said softly to herself as she turned and walked down the corridor in the opposite direction. She found herself outside of Hawk's quarters. "I have to let him know what Buck wants to do," Wilma said to herself. She knocked on the door.

"Enter," Hawk replied.

The door opened and Wilma entered Hawk's quarters. "Hawk, Buck has an idea on how to find the Kaalans," Wilma said.

"I know, he wants to use Lela as bait," Hawk replied.

"You knew?" she asked.

"Yes, I know Buck. I knew he'd want to use something that would really draw them out of hiding," Hawk replied.

"So, you're okay with it?" Wilma asked.

"No, I'm not okay with it. I don't want Lela to be placed in any kind of danger." Hawk hung his head for a moment then looked back up at Wilma. "That's why I'm going to be the bait," Hawk said.

"Hawk, you can't!!" Wilma replied.

"Can you think of another bird person?" Hawk asked.

Wilma hung her head and shook it slowly. "No," she replied.

Chapter 15

"Where is Buck now?" Hawk asked, as he placed the harness on the table.

"He's gone up to talk to the Admiral about something," Wilma replied.

Hawk gave a light nod and started to walk towards the door. Hawk

stopped and turned his head slightly to look over his shoulder at Wilma. "It's the only way," he said. Hawk placed his hand on the control panel, the door opened and he exited his quarters turning in the direction of the bridge.

Wilma stood there momentarily, not believing what Hawk just said. "How can he risk his own life like that?" she thought to herself. She slowly walked out the door and headed for the bridge herself.

Up on the bridge Buck was explaining to the Admiral what his plan was to lure the Kaalans out of hiding.

"Is Lela all right with this idea?" Asimov asked.

"I haven't talked to her yet about it," Buck replied.

Just then the door to the meeting room opened and Hawk and Wilma entered.

"I'm not going to allow you to put Lela's life in danger, Buck. If there's going to be any kind of bait, it's going to be me," Hawk said.

Buck turned and gazed at Hawk.

"Buck, Lela is still too weak to do this. If she had to run, she wouldn't be able to. No, I'm going to be the bait and there's no arguing about it," Hawk said, as he turned and walked out of the meeting room.

Buck turned towards the Admiral. "We can't let him do this," Buck said.

"Why not Buck? You were willing to put Lela's life on the line and she's injured. Why shouldn't Hawk do it?" Wilma asked.

Buck stood there for a moment, with a confused look on his face.

"I'll have to go along with Hawk's idea of him being the bait, Buck. He can run a lot faster plus he'll have his weapon," the Admiral replied.

Buck turned to leave, but Wilma stopped him.

"Buck, why were you willing to put Lela in danger, but you're not willing to put Hawk in danger?" Wilma asked softly.

Buck sighed and hung his head. "I figured Lela would be more to their

liking, her being like the others," Buck replied softly.

"Buck, it doesn't matter what kind of bird person they are. Those creatures are now killing humans," Wilma replied.

"I know. It's just that..."

"You don't want to lose a friend?" Wilma asked softly.

Buck walked away. Wilma stood there while the Admiral walked up behind her.

"He's afraid of losing someone again, isn't he?" Asimov asked.

"Yes sir," Wilma replied.

"Hawk is a very resourceful man." Asimov hesitated for a moment. "I should say, bird person."

Wilma turned towards the Admiral and smiled. "Sir, Hawk's ship should be about ready. We should start heading down to the planet," Wilma said.

Asimov nodded. "Be careful," he replied.

Hawk returned to his quarters and was picking up the harness he had made for Buck to use. A moment later a light knock at his door.

"Enter," Hawk replied, as he finished gathering his things.

Buck entered and slowly walked over and stood next to the portal.

"Hawk, I want to explain why I was going to use Lela as the bait. She told me before that the Kaalans didn't start killing humans until they thought all of her people were gone. Then when they found out she was still alive, they wanted her. I figure if they want her that bad, they'll come out of hiding to get her. You know I'd never let anything harm her," Buck said.

"I know. But in her condition, she wouldn't have a chance if she had to run even a short distance," Hawk replied.

"I know. I guess I wasn't really thinking," Buck said, as he turned to look out the portal.

Hawk walked over and stood next to him. "You're still blaming yourself for what happened to Koori, aren't you?" Hawk asked, as he looked out

the portal.

"Yes, if it wasn't for me taking her out of the caves that day.. she would still be alive today," Buck replied.

"Buck, it wasn't entirely your fault, I'm just as much to blame as you are, if not more. If I'd not attacked every ship that passed close to Throm, or attacked every human outpost I found, Koori would still be alive and we'd still be together on Throm," Hawk replied.

Buck glanced over at Hawk. "Hawk, humans murdered your whole village. I would have done the same thing," Buck said.

"No, you wouldn't have. You would have gone to the authorities to seek justice. I took justice into my own hands," Hawk replied, turning to Buck.

Just then the door buzzed. Hawk walked over and placed his hand against the control panel. The door opened and there stood Lela.

"Lela? What are you doing out of bed?" Hawk asked, helping her into his quarters and sitting her gently down in a chair.

"I heard that Buck has a plan to lure out the Kaalans and it includes me," Lela said.

"I did. But I changed my mind Lela, it's way to dangerous. Hawk is going to be the bait," Buck replied, walking over to her.

"I should be the bait, it's me they want," Lela replied.

"No!" Hawk shouted.

"Why not?" Lela asked.

"Like Buck said, it's too dangerous. You couldn't run fast enough if you had to." Hawk placed his hand on her shoulder. "And I'm not willing to lose another one of my kind," Hawk replied.

"But Hawk, I..."

"I said NO! Lela," Hawk said loudly.

Lela started to stand, Buck went to her side and helped her up. "I'll take you back to sick bay," Buck said.

Lela nodded. Buck slowly and carefully escorted Lela back to sick bay,

where Dr. Goodfellow was pacing the floor. The door opened with a whoosh.

"There you are! I've been worried. Why did you leave sick bay without an nurse to assist you?" Goodfellow asked, helping her back into bed.

"I had to speak to Hawk." Lela hung her head. "I'm sorry if I made you worry," she said softly.

"My dear girl, you must stay in bed for all of your wounds to heal properly. If you wanted to talk to Hawk, all you had to do was ask," Goodfellow said, as he pulled the blanket up over her.

Buck walked over to Lela's bedside. "Lela, I wanted to apologize. I never should have thought about using you to lure the Kaalans out of hiding," Buck said, looking down at the floor, shaking his head no.

"Buck, you have nothing to apologize for. You were using common sense, that's all," Lela replied, placing her hand gently on Buck's hand.

Buck looked into Lela's eyes. He placed his other hand on top of hers. "I swear, we will find them," Buck said.

Lela smiled. "I know you will. You and Hawk have the look of determination in your eyes." Lela hesitated for a moment. "But please, be careful, and make sure Hawk is well protected. He and I may be the last of our kind," Lela said.

"I promise, they won't get near him," Buck replied, patting her hand.

Just then the ship's intercom crackled. "Captain Rogers, report to hanger 4."

Buck smiled. "I guess it's time. We'll be in contact with the Searcher at all times. I'll make sure Dr. Goodfellow is up-dated regularly," Buck said, as he turned and walked out of the sick bay.

In the hanger, Hawk was holding Buck's harness across his arm.

"Is that Buck's harness?" Wilma asked, gazing at it.

"Yes, I also made you something. Nemna told me that you had to shift a few times. So I made you a pad with a grip," Hawk replied, handing the pad to Wilma.

"That wasn't necessary, Hawk." Wilma blushed. "But, thank you."

A moment later the hanger door opened and Buck entered.

"Are we ready to go?" Buck asked.

"Yes, here's your harness," Hawk replied, handing Buck the harness.

"Okay, let's go get those murderers," Buck said.

Wilma and Hawk stood there with shocked expressions on their face. It was the first time they've ever heard Buck use the word murderers. Buck made his way to one of the fighters.

Buck turned around and saw them standing there. "Well, are you coming or not?" he asked.

Wilma nodded and walked over to her fighter, Hawk walked over to the War Hawk. They climbed in and with in moments were propelled out of the launch tube and out in to space.

"Buck, are you all right?" Wilma asked, with concern.

"I'm fine, why?" Buck replied.

"It's just that word you used. I never heard you say it before," Wilma replied.

"What word is that, Wilma?" Buck asked.

"Murderers," Wilma replied.

"Well, that's what they are. They murdered all Lela's people and now they're murdering the human inhabitants," Buck replied.

The rest of the journey down to the planet was quiet. As the three ships came over the ridge just to the west of the guardian's mountain. They could see four of the guardians and the woman standing in a circle. Laying in the center of the circle was Mathayis. Nemna, Ghost, Saphira and Emerald were standing on their rear legs with their wings fully extended and their heads lowered. Kneeling in front of Mathayis was the woman.

Buck, Hawk and Wilma forced their throttles forward. They flew past the gathering to a clearing close to where they found the woman.

Chapter 16

They landed and quickly ran over to the guardians and the woman. Hawk continued inside of the circle, while Buck and Wilma stopped on the outer edge. Hawk knelt down next to the woman.

"What happened?" Hawk asked.

"I was gathering some fruit and herbs in that small clearing, when I heard a soft and mournful growl. When I approached, Mathayis was laying here as if he was basking in the sun enjoying the warmth. I asked him if he was all right, he turned his head and asked me to gather the others." The woman reached out and started to gently stroke Mathayis's head. "When we returned, he was gone," she said, with tears flowing down her cheek.

Wilma stood next to Nemna, tears swelling in her eyes. She placed her hand gently on Nemna's neck. Nemna turned his head slightly to look at Wilma.

With his head still lowered. "We have lost a brother, but he passed in a place he loved," Nemna said, softly.

Wilma lowered her head and wept softly as she stroked Nemna's neck. Hawk placed his hand gently on Mathayis's head and lowered his head. Buck, who was standing between Ghost and Saphira turned and walked away. Ghost and Saphira turned their attention to Buck, who was starting to lift a large rock.

"What are you doing?" Ghost asked.

Buck looked over towards Ghost. "He deserves a burial," Buck replied, as he carried the rock over and placed it next to Mathayis's body. He then walked back over and started to retrieve another one.

Hawk stood and walked over to Buck, he reached down and picked up another rock and carried it over to Mathayis's body and placed it next to the one Buck had brought over. Wilma and the woman soon started to assist Buck and Hawk. Time passed, soon it was evening. The sun was setting and the guardians still encircled Mathayis's grave. Their heads still lowered and their wings still full extended. Buck, Hawk, Wilma and the woman sat between each of the guardians through-out the night. The next morning, Buck, Hawk and Wilma woke to see the guardians and the woman still gathered around the grave.

"How long are they going to mourn Mathayis?" Buck asked, in a soft voice.

"As long as it takes," Hawk replied.

Just then all four guardians threw their heads back and simultaneously let out an ground shaking roar. It was so deep and strong the ground moved under Buck, Hawk, and Wilma's feet, causing them to lose their balance. After they regained their footing, Buck slowly walked over to the stone grave. He drew his weapon from its holster, took aim at the stones that covered Mathayis.

"Buck? What are you doing?" Wilma asked, with a puzzled look on her face.

"This will preserve his body, so everyone and everything on this planet will remember what he and the others have done," Buck replied, as he started to squeeze the trigger.

The weapon fired, turning a few of the stones to a bright red. Hawk and Wilma drew their weapons as well and fired in to the stones.

"Let us help," Ghost said, as he and the others drew a deep breath.

All four guardians lowered their heads down to the rocks that formed Mathayis's grave. They opened their mouths and discharged fire so hot that within seconds every stone was shining a brilliant red. The extreme heat transformed the dull, gray rocks into a transparent crystal, encasing Mathayis's body forever.

The guardians looked over at Buck. "Thank you, our brother," Ghost said, softly.

Buck slowly nodded his head.

"We know Mathayis asked you to bring any Kaalans to us. We wish to change that request. If you find any Kaalans, destroy them," Nemna said.

"If that is what you want, so it shall be done," Hawk replied.

Buck looked up at the sky. "It's too early in the afternoon to hunt for them. We'll start our search about sunset." Buck turned to Hawk. "Are you sure you want to do this?" Buck asked.

"It's the only way," Hawk replied.

"Do what?" Ghost asked, looking at Buck.

"Hawk is going to be the bait to lure the Kaalans out of hiding," Buck replied.

"NO!" the woman shouted.

"It's the only way," Hawk said.

"No, there's another way." She hesitated for a moment. "I'll be the bait," she said.

"NO! We will not lose our mother," Ghost shouted.

"But they want me..."

"I said, No," Ghost repeated.

Buck, Hawk and Wilma stood there confused.

"Did you call her your mother?" Wilma asked.

"Yes. This woman's ancestors have been caring for us dragons over thousands of years. Ever since the first guardian dragon was born. She carries with her the knowledge of her ancestors. She will pass it on to her daughter and her daughter shall pass it on to hers. It will continue until we, the guardians are no longer needed. When no evil is left," Nemna replied, looking at Wilma.

"That might be some time. There's still a lot of evil out there," Buck replied.

"We know. But, one day it will end," Nemna replied.

Buck turned to the woman. "That is why you helped us, isn't it?" Buck asked.

"Yes, I knew Hawk and yourself were the ones that could help the guardians end the terror on this planet. I'm just sorry I didn't tell you who I was. Please, forgive me?" the woman asked.

"There is nothing to forgive. You were protecting them and yourself. You didn't know who we were or what our cause was. We don't even know your name," Hawk said.

"My name is Gemka," Gemka replied, smiling.

"Gemka was not our adopted mother when we were born. As you can tell, she's much too young. Her great, great grandmother was our adopted

mother. But in her is the knowledge of our kind. Maybe it will be her great grand-daughter who will care for the next born," Ghost said.

"If you don't mind me asking. Why do you need a adopted mother when your mother cares for you?" Wilma asked.

Saphira walked over to Wilma. "Our true mother usually dies about two years after our birth. We are still very vulnerable at that age. Our fire lungs have not developed yet. We can hunt on our own, but we still need nurturing and ... love," Saphira replied.

"I believe every living thing needs that," Wilma said smiling.

"You must excuse us, we must feed now," Nemna said, as he spread his wings. With one flap of his wings, he was air-born. The others followed close behind.

"I'll go get us something to eat as well," Gemka said.

"May I help you?" Wilma asked.

As Wilma and Gemka searched for fruit. Wilma got a puzzled expression on her face.

"What is wrong, Wilma?" Gemka asked.

"I'm a little confused," Wilma replied as she slowly put the fruit on the ground.

"About what are you confused about?" Gemka asked, walking over to Wilma.

"The guardians told Hawk and Buck that after a couple hundred years, and after mating the males die. Nemna and Ghost are young, but Mathayis was very old. How did he survive?" Wilma asked.

"My mother told me that Mathayis was a special guardian. He was very old and wise. She told me that Mathayis never mated," Gemka replied.

"That must be the key then. Since he never mated, he lived longer. Did you know how old he was?" Wilma asked.

"My mother's mother told her that Mathayis was here when she was born. And that he was very old then," Gemka replied.

"Gemka, is your mother still living?" Wilma asked.

Gemka turned and smiled. "Yes, she lives in a small village not far from the city," Gemka replied.

"Is that the village where Lela came from?" Wilma asked.

"No. The small village where she lives now is up in the mountains on the other island," Gemka replied.

"The island of Saphira and Emerald?" Wilma asked.

"Yes," Gemka answered.

"Gemka, do you think your mother knows anything about the Kaalans?" Wilma asked, as she picked up the fruit from the ground.

"She knows more about them than I do," Gemka replied.

"Do you think she'd help us?" Wilma asked.

Gemka smiled and nodded. "I'm sure she would."

They carried the fruit they had gathered back to Hawk and Buck. Wilma told them about Gemka's mother and that she might help them.

"You and Buck stay here. I'll take Gemka in my fighter and we'll go talk to her mother," Hawk said.

"All right Hawk. But don't be gone too long. The sun will set in about three hours," Buck replied.

"We'll be back way before that time." Hawk turned to Gemka. "Are you ready Gemka?" Hawk asked.

Gemka nodded. Hawk and Gemka walked quickly over to the War Hawk. He helped her in then he climbed in, shut the hatch and started the engines. With in moments the War Hawk was gone.

Chapter 17

A short time later, Ghost, Nemna, Saphira and Emerald appeared. They glided past Buck and Wilma, circled then landed a short distance away. Buck and Wilma walked over to them.

"Where is Hawk and Gemka?" Nemna asked, glancing around.

"Hawk took Gemka to see her mother. She says that her mother would have more information about the Kaalans," Wilma replied.

Nemna looked up towards the sky. "I hope they return soon. It'll be sunset in about an hour," Nemna said.

Saphira glanced down at Wilma. "You and your friends are determined to find the Kaalans, aren't you?" Saphira asked.

"Yes, we will not leave this planet until we have either captured or disposed of all of them. They're a threat to all life forms on this planet," Wilma replied.

Saphira lowered her head and placed it gently on Wilma's arm. Wilma lowered her head and rested it briefly on Saphira's head.

On the island, Hawk and Gemka sat and listened while Gemka's mother told them everything she knew about the Kaalans.

"Thank you for all your help, Jadia," Hawk said.

"Tell me, is Lela going to be all right?" Jadia asked with a concerned voice.

Hawk smiled and gently nodded. "She's going to be fine."

"Hawk, we should leave and get back to the others, it's almost time. And they'll be waiting," Gemka said.

Hawk turned to face Gemka. "You're right, Gemka," Hawk turned his attention back to Jadia. "Thank you again for all your help," Hawk said, as he removed his glove to shake Jadia's hand.

"I'm sorry I didn't have more information for you," Jadia said, shaking Hawk's hand.

"It was more than enough," Hawk replied.

Gemka walked over and embraced her mother.

"Be careful, my daughter," Jadia whispered, softly.

"I will, Mother," Gemka replied, softly.

Jadia glanced over at Hawk. "Hawk, please be careful. They are very knowledgeable of surprise attacks," Jadia said, warning Hawk.

Hawk nodded. "So am I," he replied with a smile.

Gemka broke her embrace from her mother and backed away. "We have to go, mother," Gemka said.

Jadia followed Gemka and Hawk out the door and watched as they climbed into the War Hawk. Hawk started the engines.

"You could stay here with your mother," Hawk said, glancing over his shoulder at Gemka.

Gemka sighed. "No, I can't," she replied, her eyes swelling with tears. Gemka glanced out the window at her mother. "She is training my daughter to carry on in the ancestors way. I can not interfere," Gemka said, with tears on her face.

Hawk glanced out the window at Gemka's mother. A fragile, old woman with gray hair and deep blue eyes that sparkled in the sunlight. He then glanced back at Gemka. Her facial features were the same as her mother's. Except, her eyes were an emerald green.

"What color are your daughter's eyes?" Hawk asked.

Gemka wiped the tears from her face and cheeks. "Her eyes are deep blue, like my mother's. Why do you ask?" she asked.

Hawk glanced back out the window and saw Jadia waving. He waved back and the War Hawk left the ground.

In flight, Hawk glanced back at Gemka. "Do you know what color your ancestor's eyes were?" Hawk asked, as he guided his ship over the ocean.

"My mother told me that all the women in my family and my ancestors had either deep blue or emerald green eyes," Gemka replied.

"The color of the female guardians," Hawk thought to himself.

Back on the island, Buck and Wilma searched the skies for Hawk's ship.

"Where are they?" Wilma asked.

"I don't know. If they're not back within the next fifteen to twenty minutes, we should go ahead and start searching for the Kaalans," Buck said.

Wilma and Buck gazed at each other.

"We can still ride on the guardian's back and search. But, our chances of finding them has dropped by 1/3. They could appear anywhere," Buck said.

"Is that why you were going to use Hawk as bait, to bring them directly to you?" Saphira asked.

"Yes," Buck replied, looking over at Saphira.

"I can be the bait," Saphira said.

Buck and Wilma turned their attention to Saphira.

"What did you say?" Buck asked.

"I said, I can be the bait. What creature alive would turn down a nice large dragon dinner," Saphira said.

"No, Saphira. We can't allow you to put yourself in danger like that. We will wait for Hawk," Wilma said.

"But if we wait much longer, it'll be too late. We must do it now," Saphira said.

Buck and Wilma glanced at one another.

"We'll wait another ten minutes. If they're not back by then, we'll go ahead and have Saphira be the bait," Buck said.

"But Buck!" Wilma shouted.

"We can't wait, Wilma. If we wait too long, it'll be dark and we won't be able to see them, which would make it more dangerous," Buck replied.

"Don't worry, Wilma. I'll be fine," Saphira said.

Ghost slowly walked over to Saphira. "Please, be careful," Ghost said, gently rubbing his head and neck affectionately against Saphira's neck.

Saphira returned the affection by gently rubbing her head and neck against Ghost's neck. "I will, don't worry," she said softly.

Wilma walked over to Nemna. "I'm frightened for her Nemna," Wilma said.

"She'll be all right. I'm not going to let anything happen to either one of them, or you," Nemna replied, as he lowered his body to the

ground for Wilma.

Wilma smiled, placed her left foot on to Nemna's front leg and swung her other leg over.

Buck, watching how Wilma mounted Nemna walked over to Emerald. "I'm Buck Rogers, I guess I'm your rider," Buck said.

Emerald looked at Buck. "I believe you are. I see you also have a harness. Are you inexperienced at flying?" Emerald asked.

"Flying fighters, yes. Riding on dragons, no," Buck replied.

"Well, Buck Rogers. This will be the first for us both. Things will be a little different. In your craft, you are protected by the metal that surrounds you. On a dragon, I'm the one that protects you. In flight, you must lean with me, not against me. If you lean too far, you'll fall to your death. If you don't lean far enough, we both could die. Just sit straight and hang on to the harness. After a few minutes of diving and soaring, you'll get the feel of it. Oh, one more thing, don't kick me. I'm not a horse," Emerald said, as she lowered her body to the ground.

Just as Buck was placing his left foot on Emerald's front leg. "There's Hawk!" Wilma shouted, pointing towards the mountains.

"What took him so long?" Buck asked, as he finished mounting Emerald.

Hawk landed his fighter on the ridge behind them. He quickly exited the ship and ran over to the others.

"Where's Gemka?" Ghost asked.

"I took her back to her mother's. It'll be a lot safer for her there," Hawk replied.

"Where are you going?" Hawk asked, looking up at Buck and Wilma.

"We're going to find the Kaalans. Saphira is going to be the bait," Buck said.

"No, she's not!" Hawk shouted.

"Hawk, we didn't know when you'd be back. It's getting late and if we don't leave now, we won't find the Kaalans," Buck said.

"Jadia told me that the Kaalans come out at night. After the moons

are full and remain out until just before sunrise. If we go out now, we'll never find them," Hawk said.

"At night? How are we going to find them at night?" Wilma asked, as she climbed down off Nemna.

Hawk looked over at the dragons. "They'll find them for us. Their vision is better at night than in the day. Jadia also told me that the Kaalans eyes glow more at night, making them easier to see," Hawk replied.

"That's right. Didn't Gemka say that she saw their eyes as they came towards her house that night?" Buck asked.

"Yes, she did. So I think it would be best if we wait until the moons are full. We won't be able to see too well, but the guardians will. I'll use a basic torch down by the water's edge. If I used one of ours they'd know it wasn't one of the villagers." Hawk turned towards Saphira. "You are needed here. I'll be the bait," Hawk said.

Chapter 18

Buck, Hawk, Wilma and the guardians began going over the plan to lure the Kaalans out of hiding.

"Hawk, you said you wanted to use just an regular torch. If you use that we won't really be able to see you that well." Buck became silent for a moment. "We need more riders. With you on the ground, that leaves only Wilma and myself searching," Buck said.

"What about bringing another couple of pilots down from the Searcher?"
Wilma asked.

"There's not enough time. They wouldn't be able to get down here in time," Buck replied.

"There has to be a way," Wilma said.

Just then, Hawk heard a strange but familiar sound. "Listen!" Hawk said, turning his attention to the sky.

Coming over the ridge were two fighters. They circled the group, then landed close by the other fighters. Hawk, Buck and Wilma walked quickly over to the fighters. The engines shut down and the hatch

opened. Saphira, Emerald, Ghost and Nemna walked slowly behind Hawk, Buck and Wilma.

"Sorry we're late Capt. Rogers," Murphy said, as he and the other pilot climbed out of their fighters. "The Admiral gave us a briefing about what was going on. He sent us down to assist you in any way needed," Anderson said.

Hawk, Buck and Wilma started smiling. "It looks like we have two extra sets of eyes," Buck said.

Buck smiled then glanced over at Hawk. "Okay, Hawk, what's your plan?"
Buck asked.

Buck, Wilma, Murphy and the others gathered around in a circle.

"I'll stay close to the waters edge, but not too close. You and the guardians will be flying around close by. But, I don't want you too close where they might see or hear you. I'll try to draw them as far away from the water as I can," Hawk replied.

"Hawk, what happens if one of the planets inhabitants wonders down to the water's edge?" Wilma asked.

"I doubt that will happen. They're too frightened to come out at night, let alone get too close to the water. We don't have to worry about that happening," Hawk replied.

"Okay, sounds like we have a plan. Murphy, Johnson, you will ride on Saphira and Emerald. Wilma, you'll ride on Nemna and I'll ride on Ghost," Buck said.

Murphy and Johnson nodded and glanced over at the guardians. Saphira and Emerald gently nodded to acknowledge them.

"Are these humans pilots like yourself?" Emerald asked.

"Yes," Hawk replied.

"Then maybe they should take a flight with us to see how it will feel,"
Saphira said.

"That's a good idea." Hawk turned to the other pilots. "Murphy, Johnson, listen and do everything the guardians say," Hawk said.

Murphy and Johnson walked over and stood next to the guardians. Emerald and Saphira started to explain the maneuvers they would make and how to lean when they changed directions. Emerald and Saphira both laid down and instructed Johnson and Murphy on the procedure of mounting. Johnson and Murphy followed the instructions the guardians gave them. Emerald and Saphira both stood and walked over to the edge. The pilots glanced over the head of their ride and saw nothing but open air. They looked at one another with an unsure glance then turned their heads and looked over at Hawk and Buck.

"Have no fear," Emerald said, softly to Johnson.

"You are our riders, but we are the protectors. We will not allow any harm to come to you," Saphira said.

A moment later Saphira and Emerald spread their wings and dove off the cliff. The pilots at first were not sure on how to hold on, but they soon realized all they had to do was relax and shift when the time came.

"Are you all right?" Saphira asked.

"I'm fine. This is amazing," Murphy replied.

All of a sudden Saphira changed direction without warning. At first Murphy was caught off guard but soon adjusted to the change in the proper manner.

"You did very well. I'm sorry I changed like that with no warning. I wanted to make sure you'd know how to adjust," Saphira said.

"I understand. You wanted to make sure I'll be able to make the shift with out warning," Murphy replied.

Johnson and Emerald had gone through the same maneuvers. Only Emerald wanted to make sure her rider could stay on while in a dive. At first she flew level, then all of a sudden she dove straight down. She stayed in the dive for about five hundred feet then leveled out again.

"Whoa!!" Johnson shouted.

"Do you have fear?" Emerald asked.

"No, you just caught me off guard, that's all," Johnson replied.

"You must be able to handle yourself while we are in flight. I will be searching also and I might not be able to give you warning if I have to change directions or go into a dive all of a sudden," Emerald said.

"I understand. I'm sorry I failed you," Johnson said.

"You did not fail me. But if we are to act as one, we must act together. A life will depend on us," Emerald said.

Johnson reached down and gently ran his hand along Emerald's neck. Without warning once again Emerald went into another dive. Only this time Johnson didn't falter. He laid down along her neck. She broke her dive and leveled out once again.

"You did a good job. You relaxed and went with my dive," she said.

"Can you tell me what we will be hunting for?" Johnson asked.

"We will be protecting Hawk and searching for the Kaalans," Emerald replied.

"Do you know what the Kaalans look like?" Johnson asked.

"No. We know that their eyes glow an amber green at night and they can inhabit any form they devour. They are murderous killers. They've murdered every one of the bird people that lived peacefully on this planet. Now they have turned to killing the humans. They must be stopped," Emerald replied.

"It is time for us to return to the others. It's getting late and it's almost time," Saphira said.

As they joined up, Emerald and Saphira gently nodded to one another.

"It is time to return," Saphira said.

They flew back to the ledge, Emerald landed first, followed by Saphira.

Johnson and Murphy dismounted and walked over towards Buck and Wilma.

"How was it?" Buck asked.

"They are truly fine riders. They will be good as our riders," Emerald replied.

Saphira glanced around and didn't see Hawk and Ghost. "Where are our brothers?" Saphira asked.

"Ghost took Hawk to just the other side of the ridge. He dropped him off there, then Hawk will start his way to the lake from there. We are to wait for thirty minutes then start our patrol. He wants time to get there and get things ready," Wilma replied.

"That is too dangerous. He should have waited for us to return. Anything can happen during that time," Emerald said.

"That's what I told him. But he's determined to get everyone of the Kaalans tonight. He does have his weapon though, so he should be safe enough," Wilma said.

"You don't understand! Kaalans hunt in what you humans call packs. They never hunt alone. Hawk won't have a chance against a pack of them, not alone!" Emerald said, loudly.

"In packs?" Buck asked, with concern in his voice.

"Yes, one will be a decoy while the others circle their pray. While the pray is focused on the decoy the others will attack from all sides. The Kaalans will use a child or small animal form to lure in their pray, then when the pray is fixed on the lure, they attack with all their might. Tearing and shredding their pray to pieces," Saphira replied.

"We're not waiting thirty minutes we're going NOW!" Buck said as he ran towards Ghost.

Ghost laid down and allowed Buck to mount within moments. Wilma, Johnson and Murphy did the same with Saphira, Nemna and Emerald. Within moments, all were air-borne and heading towards the area where Ghost had dropped off Hawk just a short time before.

Hawk was slowly walking towards the pond, where earlier Buck said he saw the outline of the shadow. He started to place small dim torches around as he got closer to the water. He had one more to place when something caught his eye. In front of him was a shadow, not too close to the water's edge, but close enough to be in danger.

"You must leave," he shouted.

The person didn't move or turn their head towards him.

Hawk ran quickly towards them. "You must get away from the water!" he

shouted.

The person finally turned towards Hawk. It was a small child. Hawk started to slow his pace as he approached the child, looking around as he got closer. He was about to reach the child when a lime green light flashed in front of him. The child fell to the ground. He turned to see Buck and the rest walking quickly towards him.

"Why did you do that? You killed this child!" Hawk yelled.

"Hawk, it was a set up. She was the bait and you're the prey. She was placed here to attract you. I bet right now the others are gathering close by," Buck explained.

"Bait? What are you talking about?" Hawk asked, glancing down at the child.

"Lets leave this area. We need to talk some place where they can not hear or see us," Buck said.

As they were about to leave, Hawk glanced over at the child lying on the ground not far from them. "Look," Hawk said, pointing towards the body.

They turned their heads to see the body starting to turn a amber green mixed with white and orange lights. With in a few moments the girl's body was gone. They slowly walked back over to the body. There, lying in the same area of the little girl's body, were the remains of an reptilian creature.

Chapter 19

"Hawk, did you recognize the little girl?" Buck asked.

"Yes, it was the girl from the city. The one her brother was trying to sell," Hawk replied.

"Now we know they can take on the form of other things," Hawk said, as he knelt down next to the remains.

"We should leave this area and come up with a different plan." Buck looked down at the creatures remains. "What should we do with the remains?"

"Leave it," Nemna replied.

"We could learn so much from it. If we could take it up to the Searcher," Wilma said.

"No, I have another idea. What would be the best way to bring them out of hiding, besides live bait?" Hawk asked, glancing up at Buck.

Buck stood with a confused expression on his face. "I don't know," Buck replied, staring down at Hawk and the remains.

"How about the prey feeding on the attacker?" Hawk asked.

"Hawk!" Wilma said loudly.

"Hawk's right. He'll be claiming the kill, which in turn might draw them out of hiding," Buck replied, nodding.

"But how would that draw them out?" Saphira asked.

"They will see me feeding on one of them. That should draw them out. They will instinctively want to fight for the kill," Hawk replied.

"Hawk, that's too dangerous," Wilma said.

"Can you think of any thing better to draw them out?" Hawk asked.

She stared at Hawk and Buck for a moment. "No, I can't. But, please be careful," Wilma replied.

"Okay then, let's get out of here. The longer we stay the longer it'll be before they come out," Buck said, as he walked over and started to mount Ghost.

Murphy, Johnson and Wilma walked over and stood next to the other guardians. Wilma turned. "Be careful, Hawk," she said, as she mounted Nemna.

"I will keep a shape eye out. Most likely they will come from different directions," Hawk replied.

Wilma nodded. After a few steps, Nemna leapt into the air and was gone. The others followed. Hawk started to gather some rocks, placing them in a small circle. He then started to gather sticks, branches and placed them in the center of the fire-ring. He drew his weapon and fired a single shot into the ring filled with the branches and sticks. Within seconds the branches and sticks burst into flames. He knelt down and started to stir the wood around. He then pulled the remains closer to

the outside of the ring in front of him. He reached down and pulled some food out of his bag and started to eat. About an hour had passed and still no sign of the attackers. He reached down and pulled up some more food and started to eat again. He had just taken a bite when he heard a noise behind him. He stood slowly and turned around.

A short distance from him were about five Kaalans. Hawk drew his weapon. He heard another noise coming from the direction of the water's edge. He glanced over his shoulder to see more Kaalans walking towards him. In the dark, their eyes glowed an amber green. As they came closer, their eyes glowed even brighter. Hawk turned back to the first five that appeared and raised his weapon. Taking careful aim, he fired a shot, missing the lead Kaalan's right front foot. The Kaalans kept walking towards Hawk, but at a slightly faster pace. Hawk took aim once again. This time he wasn't going to miss.

He fired another shot and hit one of the Kaalans directly in the head. It let out a scream and started rolling over and over again, writhing wildly on the ground. The others slowed and glanced over at the one that had been shot. Hawk turned his attention to the Kaalans that were walking up behind him. He took aim and fired a shot at the lead Kaalan, hitting it in the front leg. It, too, let out a screaming cry. Just as Hawk was about to turn back to the other four Kaalans, he heard some flapping behind him. He turned around again to see Ghost, Buck, Johnson and Emerald landing just behind the Kaalans. Emerald and Ghost took a deep breath and exhaled a stream of fire, setting the Kaalans on fire. The Kaalans began screaming. Hawk turned his attention back to the Kaalans that had been almost upon him. He was about to fire his weapon again when Wilma, Nemna, Murphy and Saphira landed just behind the attacking Kaalans. Saphira and Nemna opened their mouths, reached down and picked up two of the Kaalans. Once in their mouths, Saphira and Nemna shook their heads viciously from side to side then bit down. Hearing the screaming, Wilma had to cover her ears.

Hawk took aim again and fired his weapon, hitting another one of the remaining Kaalans. It let out a high-pitched scream as it rolled over and over. Ghost and Emerald were just about to take another breath when Emerald let out a loud roar of pain. Johnson turned around to see that a Kaalan had bit Emerald on the upper part of her right rear leg. He jumped down off Emerald's back, drew his weapon and ran toward the attacking Kaalan. The vicious creature, seeing a smaller more accessible meal released Emerald's leg and started toward Johnson.

Just as Johnson was about to raise his weapon, Emerald whipped her tail and slammed it down on another Kaalan that was approaching Johnson from behind him. It appeared out of the small bushes just behind him. Johnson not seeing the creature or what Emerald had done fired his

weapon at the on-coming creature that had attacked Emerald's leg. Johnson, on foot, was now the main target for all the remaining creatures. He turned and ran back toward Emerald's head. Hawk, still standing by the fire-ring, noticed that one of the injured Kaalans was trying to get back to the water. He ran toward it only to be blocked by the few remaining Kaalans. The guardians and their riders turned to see the few remaining Kaalans attacking Hawk. Ghost and Buck turned just in time to see one of the Kaalans lunge towards his friend.

Then out of nowhere a blast of red light hit the lunging creature and knocked it backwards. Hawk turned to see three men running towards him from the forest edge.

Ghost leapt up into the air and with one flap of his massive wings, landed in front of the escaping Kaalan. Ghost opened his mouth, picked up the lumbering creature and snapped his jaws shut.

Hawk stopped and started to look around. Buck, Ghost, Wilma, Nemna gathered close to him. The three men walked up and smiled. Hawk then turned his attention back to the three remaining Kaalans. By the time he raised his weapon to fire, Saphira and Emerald had them in their mouths. Hawk then turned back to the men.

"Sorry we're late. We heard that you were coming to fight the Kaalans from Jadia and her daughter. We tried to gather as many people as possible, but they were too frightened," One of the men said.

"You still made it in time, thank you," Hawk said, reaching out his hand.

The men gently nodded. Buck, Wilma, Murphy and Johnson walked over to join them.

"We owe you a lot. You saved our planet and the people who live here," another man said.

"It wasn't just us. Your guardians are the true protectors of this planet. You should be thanking them," Hawk replied.

"You're right. My father, grandfather and great-grandfather knew of the protectors of this planet. But, we didn't know they really existed, until now." The men walked over to the guardians. "We thank you with all our hearts and souls," one of the men said, placing his hand gently on Ghost's neck.

"We will always be here to protect you. It is our destiny," Ghost replied.

The three men smiled and walked back into the forest. Hawk, Buck, Wilma, Johnson and Murphy walked over to the guardians.

"It is time for you to leave now, our brothers and sister. But first, reach into the small bag hanging around Saphira's neck. Inside you will find an emblem. If you ever return to this planet, you will be accepted by our next family as brothers and sister," Nemna said.

Hawk reached up and pulled a small red velvet bag out from around Saphira's neck.

"Thank you, my brother. Maybe... one day soon, we will meet again," Hawk said.

They mounted the guardians for the last time. In one leap, they were all air born and heading towards the cliffs. They dismounted, and Wilma walked up to Nemna.

"I will truly miss you," Wilma said, embracing Nemna's neck.

"And I you," Nemna replied.

Hawk, Buck, Johnson and Murphy nodded then turned and walked away. Wilma broke her embrace and followed.

They climbed into the fighters, started the engines and watched as the guardians took flight. With the guardians gone, the fighters let the planet and headed back up to the Searcher.

"Buck to Searcher."

"Searcher to Capt. Rogers... go ahead."

"Requesting landing bay numbers."

"Approach landing bays, 3, 4, 5, and 6."

"Landing bays 3, 4, 5 and 6... affirmative. Rogers out."

"Searcher out."

They guided their fighters into the assigned landing bays and shut down their engines. Admiral Asimov walked over to greet them as they exited the fighters.

"How did it go?" Asimov asked.

"As far as we know of, Admiral, all of the Kaalans have been destroyed," Hawk replied.

"You five could do with some much needed rest. Report to your quarters. I don't want to see you for twenty-four hours," Asimov ordered.

"Yes sir, and thank you," Hawk said.

Hawk, Buck and Wilma walked out of the hanger bay and walked slowly to Wilma's quarters.

"I'll see you later, Wilma," Buck said.

"Wilma smiled an exhausted smile and placed her hand on the control panel. The door opened and she entered. Inside, she sat down and looked at the small red velvet bag in her hand. She opened it and found inside a brilliant red jewel. She gasped with surprise then smiled.

Buck entered his quarters and opened his bag. Inside he found a bright green gem. He smiled and placed it on the table next to him.

Hawk entered his quarters, placed the velvet bag down and walked over to the portal, gazing out he smiled. "I will return, some day my brothers," he said softly. He turned, picked up the bag and opened it. Inside was a deep blue gem. Hawk smiled, walked over and pulled out a piece of leather he had left over from the harness he made Buck earlier. He entwined it around the jewel and tied it around his neck.

"Good bye," he said, as he turned towards his sleeping area.

... Closing Chapter ...

A few days had passed since Hawk, Buck, Wilma, Johnson and Murphy had their battle with the Kaalans. They were fully rested and back on duty. In the sickbay, Lela had completely recovered from her injuries. The sickbay door opened and Admiral Asimov walked into the sick bay. "How are you feeling?" he asked.

"I'm feeling much better, thank you," Lela replied.

"I've made a call to the Galactic Council about your planet and the trouble you've had with the Kaalans. Seeing we're unable to scan below the water surface to make sure all the Kaalans have been destroyed. The

Galactic Council is sending another ship with new equipment that can scan below the water, along with technicians to run it. They'll make sure no Kaalans remain on your planet," Asimov said.

"Thank you," Lela replied, with tears swelling in her eyes.

"I know you've lost all your people. You're more than welcome to stay on the Searcher," Asimov said.

Lela looked up at the Admiral with tear-filled eyes. "I want to go home," she said, softly.

The Admiral nodded with understanding. "When you're ready, one of my crew members will return you to Osjewelco," he replied. He turned and left the sickbay.

A day later, Hawk was asked to take Lela and the old woman back down to the planet's surface. He landed on the cliff, close to the crystalized rocks that encased Mathayis's body.

"What happened to Mathayis?" Lela asked, gently running her hands over the crystal grave.

"He died before the battle began. He was very old from what Gemka said. The other guardians are still alive and doing well," Hawk replied.

Lela hung her head and started to weep softly. She looked up at Hawk. "He'd still be alive if I was here," she said, weeping.

Hawk started assisting the two women back into the shuttle, when he heard a familiar sound. He turned to see Ghost and Saphira fly past them going up at a high rate of speed. As they flew upward, they circled one another. Then without leveling out they grabbed one another with their talons. They started into a free-fall, locked on to each other. Their massive wings extended above their heads. They spiraled down towards the ground. Hawk stood on the edge watching this magnificent display of courtship. About one hundred feet from the ground they broke their holding grip and parted.

Lela smiled as she watched. "They're going to be mates," she said, smiling at Hawk.

"How about Nemna and Emerald? Will they be mates also?" Hawk asked.

"Yes," she replied.

Hawk smiled as he continued helping Lela into the shuttle. "I'll take

you home now," Hawk said, as he entered the shuttle.

The shuttle door closed and shortly afterward was on its way down to the small village. Hawk landed the shuttle in the clearing where they first came in contact with Lela and her people. Some of the villagers ran over to meet the shuttle, waving. Hawk opened the door and helped the old woman out first, followed by Lela. Some of the villagers, who were injured in the raid the day Hawk, Buck and Wilma arrived, slowly walked over. Everyone embraced the old woman and then Lela.

Lela turned to Hawk. "Won't you stay with us?" she asked.

"I can not. I must search for more of my people." Hawk hung his head for a moment then raised his head and looked at Lela once again. "I have to serve out my punishment on the Searcher for what I did," Hawk replied.

"What you did on Throm?" Lela asked.

"Yes," Hawk replied.

"You did what anyone would have done, after having their whole family murdered," Lela said.

Hawk looked up towards the sky. "You will be well protected now. The guardians will mate and have young and the other ship will be here soon with the underwater monitor. Most likely, they too will stay." Hawk turned his attention back to Lela. "We are family, not by blood, but by our ancestors," Hawk said, as he turned and started to walk back to the shuttle.

"You will return, won't you?" Lela asked.

Hawk stopped and turned his head towards Lela. "I will return, someday," he replied, as he entered the shuttle.

Lela and the old woman, along with the people from the small village watched and waved as the shuttle took off.

"Take care, my sister," Hawk said, softly as he headed back out into space.

The End

