

# Balamar

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By

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## Prologue

On the fringe of the Milky Way galaxy, a great sun anchors fifteen planets circling it on varying orbits. All but the fifth planet are lifeless and have few distinguishable characteristics. The fifth planet, however, stands forth among all others as a sparkling jewel lying upon the black velvet inter-space of the universe. Hewn of blues, shades of green and brown are painted across the equatorial belt while wisps of white and grey wind and feather, overlaying the orb. Three whitish-gray moons whirl about the planet on different orbits. Since the galaxy's birth, the fifth planet's proximity to its sun has created an environment unique to but a few in the universe. Life has formed over billions of years throughout the ocean and on the various volcanic islands, large and small, that formed around its equator

Looking down through the swirling clouds ten degrees above the equatorial line lays the large oblong nation island of Balamar. At the center of the island stands the dying volcanic mountain Bal, from which the island takes its name. Lush green foothills surround Bal's stone gray spire, making up one third of the land mass, with the balance, gently sloping plains flowing outward to the cliffs surrounding the island. The strong currents and constant angry ocean waters have worn away at Bal's granite base forming thirty-meter high cliffs ringing the entire island.

The island's centerline through the oblong length is parallel to the equator. The end that sees the rising sun is called the Front Side and the trailing end witnessing sunsets the Back Side. Sitting above the equator results in the top side of the island nearly

perpetually in the shadows of Bal, resulting in a cooler climate. It's called the Cool Side.

The side closer to the equator is known as the Warm Side.

At the tip of the Front Side, built along the cliff sides, is the capital city of the dominant beings inhabiting the island. The half-moon shaped city has grown to nearly thirty percent of the island's population of shalomans over the past twenty-five circuits of the sun (a circuit is one complete orbit around the sun. Each circuit takes 425 planet revolutions to make the orbit and each revolution is thirty increments in time.)

At the center of Front Side City on a low plateau are assorted buildings of the island's high government, which has preeminent authority over all governmental entities throughout the island. The authority of the government was established during the first circuit, when shalomans began officially recording time. Prior to the recording of time, there were three warring tribal factions who until circuit one had been in perpetual conquest for control of the island. In the circuits preceding One, there came to be very wise and forward thinking leaders of each tribe who formed a council to put an end to the never-ending hardship of all the island's inhabitants caused by the ongoing conflict. Twelve members of the council presented the three leaders with laws and regulations for governing the island. Pleased with their work, the leaders, and council members signed them into law and named them The Codex Axiom. In the 789 circuits since the signing, there had been only a few minor amendments to the governing document, until this circuit.

## Chapter 1

### A Great Lord Dies

Cupping her chin between his thumb and two fingers, Lord Villi chortles, “My, a delight are you to the senses, Im. Fortunate to have you at his side was Lord Onor.” His irises narrow in focus and nostrils flare to read her emotions.

“Don’t, Lord Villi, please.” Im, a receiver, pulls back from Lord Villi’s personal suggestions, her eyes flashing wide open with fear and then snapping back narrow with disgust. A shaloman’s eyes and emotion glands emit a variety of ferons nonverbally that communicate feelings, emotions and sexual orientation. Lord Villi is a master at interpreting nonverbal cues.

Shalomans all look nearly the same. Standing about a meter and half tall, they have teardrop-shaped heads sitting on a long narrow neck atop sloping shoulders and with long arms ending with two fingers and an opposing thumb. Although their features are slight, their muscle and bone density is such that they possess significant strength. Their skin is a shade of gray blue without hair or normally any abnormalities, their faces are generic

between both sexes with the only distinguishing characteristic occurring later in life. The providers will grow a narrow white-haired goatee

“Forgive me, Im; only trying to cheer you at this difficult time, I was.”

“Sorry I am, Lord Villi, a sad shock this is.”

“Yes my dear, tragic it is, at such an important time for the loyal opposition, is it not.” Lord Villi’s eyes flicker with a quick uncharacteristic flash, his lip curling slightly when he speaks the word *tragic*.

A most perceptive Im reads Lord Villi clearly, sending fear coursing through her being. She quickly bows her head and lowers her eyelids to mask her expression of fear. “Go I must, please excuse.”

Im hides her eye expression, but Lord Villi’s nostrils flare wide, picking up her scent of fear. “Such a talent as yours need not be wasted in the loss of Lord Onor, dear Im. A job with my staff is available when you are ready to resume duties in the House.”

“Thank you, Honorable Lord. Think about it I will.” Turning away, Im shuffles quickly to her work pod.

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In the warm side quadrant of the House of Lords building, facing the ocean, the Chief of City Security, Teldar, stands before the writing table of Lord Onor, directing the investigation. Lord Onor’s form lies across the table face down as the House security

staff takes pictures and measurements, collecting any possible evidence of wrongdoing.

Crime on the island is rare and violent crime even more rare except in the city slums.

Lord Villi turns his attention to the activities surrounding his great adversary's lifeless form. "Teldar, an unfortunate passage for the good Lord. Succumbed to what, do you suppose?"

Chief Teldar now stands over Lord Onor's form lying out on the floor where technicians scan for any obvious injuries. "Obvious cause there is none, Lord Villi. Perhaps consumption, aged he was."

"Careful good Chief, my age he was." A snide smile flashes at Teldar.

Teldar ignores Lord Villi's snipe. "To the infirmary Onor's form will be sent to have his system inspected for the cause of his passage. Know we should in a few days."

"Yes Chief, know we should. Of course notify me you will as soon as you learn something of this."

"Of course Lord Villi, the first to know you will be."

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Sitting in the low amber light of her pod, the flash of Lord Villi's eyes play over and over in Im's conscience. The importance of her leader Lord Onor's address to the House

of Lords Ruling Council tomorrow she knows will be sure to kill Lord Villi's efforts to open up the Preservation Territory (also known as the Preserve.) Would Lord Villi go to the extreme of terminating Lord Onor to prevent defeat?

"Im, what has happened?" Startled, Im, facing away from the entrance, turns only her head to look at Tam (shalomans have the ability to rotate their heads three hundred degrees). Tam, Lord Onor's other assistant, stands in the opening of her pod, looking toward the group of security staff surrounding Lord Onor's table.

Im's body swivels on her pedestal until her entire form faces Tam. Tam steps into the pod. His nose flares, picking up Im's scent. "In fear you are, why?"

"Passed has Lord Onor."

"Passed?" Tam's eyes widen in surprise. "What is your meaning, passed?"

"Passed to the other side has Lord Onor. Found him I did, on his desk, lying still."

Tam senses extreme sorrow in her words as Im closes her eyes tightly. "How Im? In good health he was when I saw him last. Possible, it is not."

"Yes Tam, in good health he was. Not natural his passage was, I fear."

“Not natural, what is the meaning of not natural? Terminated he was you are saying? Who would brave such a thing? How could he not be seen in such an act, in this office? Who would do such a thing?”

Im’s eyes open, staring directly into Tam’s, radiating abject fear; she bitterly whispers two words, “Lord Villi.”

Tam’s eyes widen with astonishment at Im’s allegation. His nose flares fully. “How can such a thing you say, Im?”

“Lost his composure, did Lord Villi, for a brief moment when we talked about Lord Onor’s address tomorrow. A vicious contempt his eyes flashed for Lord Onor. Curled mockingly his lip did when he spoke the word *tragic*. Know how he did it, I do not, but in some way he is involved, I fear. Want Onor to make his address tomorrow he did not.”

Tam sits down on the pedestal before the table where Im sits. They silently consider Im’s words.

Chief Teldar peers into the pod, Lord Villi stoically stands with his hands clasped behind his back, off to the Chief’s side, in full view of Im and Tam. “Excuse me Im, leaving now we are. Sent to the infirmary Lord Onor’s form will be for further inspection. Working here in the next sunrise will you be?”

“Yes.”



“Send I will our best inspector to interview you tomorrow.” The Chief nods goodbye and steps around Lord Villi, following his staff and Lord Onor’s form.

“Hello, Tam. Nice to see from the Cool Side that you have safely returned. Trust I do fruitful your mission was.” Unmoved Lord Villi stares coldly at Tam.

Tam, unfazed by Villi’s customary aggressive behavior toward providers of a lower rank, cheerfully replies, “Why thank you good Lord. Fruitful it was. Regret I do that Lord Onor is not here to witness the information I gathered. Sure I am it would have pleased him.”

Lord Villi’s lip curls and his eyes flash anger at Tam’s arrogance. “Useless it is now.” He snarls in an acidic tone, turns and leaves.

Tam and Im’s eyes embrace. “Right you are Im, involved some how is Villi in Lord Onor’s passage.”

“Prove it I know not how Tam, but we must.” Im’s scent of fear gives way to anger and retribution.

“Come look for Lord Onor’s address to the council we must.” Tam leaps from his seat and strides toward Onor’s work table, looking behind him to see if anyone is still in the chambers.

“Checked the recorder I did and found the disk missing, Tam. No scribed copy did I find here; left it in his domicile perhaps he did. A pass card for it he gave me. Go there we must before the investigators do.” (A recorder is a typing system that produces a disk that can be placed into a printer to create written text.)

Im and Tam take a shuttle, the principal form of transportation within the city, arriving at Lord Onor’s office at twenty-five increments. It is a late hour and there are few forms on the byways. At Onor’s entrance, they find the door standing partially open and illumination on. Tam steps through the entrance first, nose fully flared and his bat-like ears fully extended. There is no sign of any form. The entire domicile is in disarray. Someone beat them here, and they do not find a copy of Lord Onor’s address. Tam whispers, “Villi.”

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At seven increments after sunrise, Inspector Wa steps into Im’s pod. “Excuse me, Inspector Wa I am. Lord Onor’s passage I am here to discuss. Are you Im?”

“Yes, how and why he passed you will know when?”

Wa’s eyes flash, surprised by Im’s assertive tone. He flares and studies her eyes, recognizing her aggression. “Another day, perhaps. Lab work they are doing and that takes a few days before results are known. Concerned you are about what?”

“To the point I will be, Inspector. Aged was Lord Onor but his systems check up twenty sunrises ago demonstrated that in operation they were like a form fewer than eighty circuits.” (Most shalomans live to an average of 150 circuits, at which time the genetic code of the cells that make up their form triggers a death cycle usually resulting in a quick passage.) “Believe I do, not natural Onor’s passage was.”

“Terminated you think he was? A very bold assumption that is. What evidence do you have access to that we in security do not that leads you to think so? A suspect you have in mind?” Sarcasm is detectable in his last question.

“Lord Villi it was, sure I am.”

Wa’s eyes widen with astonishment and disbelief. “What is this you say? What proof have you of such an outrageous accusation about one of the most powerful leaders in the land? Careful you must be to not let your terrible loss create distorted thinking.” He recently graduated at the top of his class at the Island University and is recognized as a highly capable analyst, which is why Wa has been assigned to the investigation unit. Having only worked several minor theft-related cases, this is his first case related to passage; because of his experience, Im believes the appointment to this case was not coincidental.

Irritated that the young inspector seems to have lost the all-important objectivity necessary for his occupation, Im inquires, “Tell me, inspector, just what is it you know of Lord Onor’s passage?”

Wa's eyes squint, sensing Im is challenging his abilities. "Found by you Lord Onor was at approximately 21:35. Working late he had been on his address to the council about the Preserve for today. Lying still he was on his table with no indication of physical violence, but had fluids from his mouth on the table. With the infirmary technicians his form is now, who will scan it for cause of passage. Spoken I have with Lord Villi who was with him at 20:40 for short time. The address they discussed, then he left. Well Lord Onor seemed at their meeting, he said. Here I am now to learn what you know of this."

"Learn what I know? Then please carefully listen. What I know is this. A systems check at the infirmary Lord Onor had twenty circuits past and was found to be very well. Last to see Lord Onor before his passage was Lord Villi. Argued harshly about the address Lord Onor was preparing for today Lord Villi and Lord Onor did. Lord Onor lying still was when I found him, the disk of his address from his recorder removed. To Lord Onor's domicile looking for a copy of the address Tam and I went. When we arrived, the door ajar we found. Someone had been there and everywhere searched. For any other copies of the address they were looking. Find a copy we did not."

"To Lord Onor's domicile I did not yet go. Another crime scene it seems. Go there I must. Is this all you know?"

"More there is. At the meeting with Lord Onor, Drayga, Lord Villi's lead assistant, was. Lord Onor had sent Tam and me to do research. As I was leaving, Lord Villi and Drayga walked in. Stay I should have."

“Know this I do, and I have talked with Drayga. Lord Villi’s story he confirmed.”

“Expected he would...loyal he is...too loyal.”

“Anything more?”

“A master of his emotions, Lord Villi is. But when giving his condolences, instead of remorse at the passage of someone he served in the House with for over thirty circuits, Lord Villi’s eyes strangely flashed and his lip in hatred curled.” Im watches Inspector Wa’s reaction, expecting dismissal of her interpretation of the incident.

“Warned me, the Chief did, that you might claim a conspiracy over a natural event.”

Im huffs, “Friends they are, Villi and Teldar. Too close is my feeling. Clever with his alliances is Lord Villi. Always leveraging his relationships, he does. A favor here, a favor there, his power and control he buys, at a terrible cost to the citizens.”

“At our office this morning Lord Villi was. Leaving Chief Teldar’s pod he was, just before this case the Chief assigned to me. Convenient it was.” Wa’s last statement seemed more reflective than a simple statement of fact to Im.

“When this occurred where was Tam?” Wa continues after a brief reflective pause in his interview.

“Gone to the Cool Side, he had to talk to scientist about the Preserve. Arrived back here, he did just as the Security staff’s investigation concluded.”

“He is where now?”

“For a copy of the address he is looking. Careful Lord Onor was. More than one copy he would have. Somewhere it must be.”

“Im, a simple coincidence it may be that you have told me. Unless there is more conclusive evidence, what more can be said?”

“Wait we must for the infirmary’s report. Unnatural causes they surely must find. Of their report, you expect to know when?”

“After the next sunrise a preliminary report will be issued. The technician in charge of the system check, a friend I graduated with works for. Talk to her I will.”

“What you learn from him, you will let me know?”

“Her”

“Her?”

“A receiver my friend is.”

“Ah, I see. A close friend she is?”

Wa’s eyes bat nervously. “Asking the questions I thought I was supposed to be?”

“Excuse me, Inspector. I seem to have touched a nerve. A special friend she must be.”

Im maliciously goads the young inspector.

“Go I must. Check I will at the infirmary. Contact me if you have anymore information.”

Im flashes Wa a grateful look, “Call I will, and so shall you.”

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Tam walks into Im’s pod, defeat reflected on his face. “No evidence of another copy of the address can I find. To them Villi’s cohorts must have gotten. What can we do?”

“Nothing yet. Speak with the Inspector I did. Assigned a new graduate Teldar did. In Teldar’s pod early Villi was. He is thorough in his scheming, so more thorough we must be in ours.” Im sits numbly, thinking that Ville will evade the truth. A flash crosses her face as she turns toward Tam. “Know we should tomorrow what the form scan will produce. Be ready we must.”

Bewilderment blankets Tam's face. "For what must we be ready?"

"A trap to set."

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An orange glow rims the horizon slowly, widening like a gilded veil rising over the darkness. Im and Tam sit at Lord Onor's table. Tam looks up from the recorder out through the curved window fronting the length of the chamber facing the sunrise.

"Beginning the day is."

"Go seek Inspector Wa. From the infirmary, ask what he has learned. An appointment to see Lord Villi I will make."

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The business of the House of Lords has been suspended because of Lord Onor's passage awaiting the appointment of a temporary replacement. Lord Villi, the senior Lord, is responsible for selecting the replacement, who must be of Lord Onor's party and from his region.

"How nice it is to see you so soon again, Im. Soon to beckon you to my chambers I was."



Lord Villi seems in a high mood, muses Im. Supremely confident he is. “A convenient coincidence, Good Lord, with your business please proceed, as mine is assuredly less significant.”

“Know you must, the House business cannot proceed until a temporary form replaces our dearly departed Lord Onor. Important matters require urgency in seeking this replacement. Tasked me the Supreme Council of the House has as the Majority Leader, to appoint a shaloman to Onor’s seat of his party and region. You Im, I am selecting. Closest to him you were. What say you? Accept you must, my dear.”

Stunned by this development, and although Im knew the rules of the house well, her focus on seeking revenge against Villi had distracted her attention away from this obvious move. “Surprised I am, Lord Villi. Reflect might I on this for a few increments and to you respond back?”

“Of course, Im. Expected you to be deliberative I did. By twelve increments speak with me you will? Enough time will that be? And, what matter did you have for me?”

Because of this new twist, Im decides to defer setting the trap. “To discuss the house agenda, I came to do. But premature to your request that seems, so wait until later I shall.”

Lord Villi’s confidence and assuredness is beaming in his eyes and scent. “So be it. Talk again later we shall.”

“Yes, later we shall. Good day, Lord Villi.”

“A good day it will be if accept you do, Im.”

Im turns back, staring at Lord Villi, holding her emotions in check. She gives the Lord a pleasant smile.

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Walking into Lord Onor’s chambers, Im finds Tam speaking with the Inspector outside Tam’s pod. She sets her shoulder bag down beside them. She say, “Learned what from the Infirmary have you, Inspector?” Direct to the critical issues, Im surprises both of them.

Giving Tam a mocking smile, Inspector Wa laments, “Not much for social graces, is she Tam.”

“Efficient Im is, especially if of lesser favor to her you are. Not to be on her bad side is best,” Tam explains gingerly.

“Standing before you is your new Lord of the House; hence care should be taken in your manner of speaking,” says Im

“New Lord!?!” Tam flashes astonishment while Wa looks on curiously.

“Appoint me to represent Lord Onor’s seat in the House Lord Villi wants, until an election is held. Before an elected Lord takes Onor’s seat, his legislation for opening the Preserve he means to expedite, it seems. Smug he is, beaming with confidence that his despicable plan will result in grand success for his party and his reelection to the Leadership Chair. For our plan, all the better.”

“Plan, what plan?” Inspector Wa looks back and forth at Onor’s assistants.

“Before you become involved, hear we must of what new you have learned.” Im walks to Lord Onor’s table and sits down on his pedestal. Tam and the Inspector follow, taking a seat on the visitor’s pedestals.

Seriousness cloaks the Inspector’s being. “Interesting situations occur with Lord Onor’s passage. Observed Lord Villi was, speaking with the Lead Technician scanning Onor’s form, my friend reports. His interest into this depth of the investigation I find unexpected. A much too busy Lord he should be to trouble with this aspect of the investigation.”

“Curious indeed.” Tam looks at Im questioningly, and then asks, “Your friend, more she has?”

“Yes. Later today available a preliminary report will be. State it will that the cause of passage is inconclusive, she said. No organs failed, and the system, as you spoke of, was in very good condition. Found an unidentifiable chemical in the lab work of Onor’s

system she did. One they have no record of. This is why the report will read inconclusive. Know they do not if this strange chemical caused his passage.”

“But it might have. Right?” Im asks cautiously.

“Correct.”

“An unidentifiable chemical in his system would Lord Onor have how?” Im is not ready to accept an indecisive lab report.

“Good question it is, Im. The inspection of Onor’s form found a small breach of his membrane surface, my friend said. A puncture wound she thought it might be. Because it was in the armpit, the Lead Technician dismissed it. A blemish it was he thought. Very suspicious my friend is about the technician’s thoroughness.”

“Without evidence of wrong doing, there is no cause for further investigation, correct inspector?” Im’s expression reflects seriousness and concentration.

“True it is, and what we have now provides no direction.”

“Truth then must be discovered.” The Inspector and Tam have no doubts about her resolution to find out just what that might be.

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“Lord Villi, here to accept the appointment to Lord Onor’s seat I am.”

“Come sit, dear Lord Im. Announce I will at the council meeting. Planning we are for the resumption of the business of the House. Ready will you be to discuss the matters of the Cool Side Region in two sunrises?”

“Of course. Thorough Lord Onor was with his preparations on all matters.” Im notices a sudden flicker of Villi’s eyes at the notion that she has everything of Onor’s. *Does he think I have a copy of Lord Onor’s address on the Preserve?* Im coolly watches and inhales slowly, her nostrils slightly flared, searching for some sign that she has him guessing.

“As I expect he would. With the floor scheduler, the time you need schedule.” Villi’s mood cools, his eyes squinting and scent neutral.

“Mostly minor matters which should require little time.” Im smiles cordially to assuage Villi’s anxiety, thinking, *Comfortable and confident keep him I must until into my trap it is time to lure him.*

“Begin we will in two days. We will allow Lords to address Lord Onor’s passage and contributions for the record during the opening session. Prepare your comments you might consider.”

“Prepare them I will. Go I must. Is there more we need to discuss at this time? Your consideration of me to fill Lord Onor’s seat a just reward will bring.” Im flashes a flirty look with her eyes and smiles demurely.

Villi senses her warming, smiles. “Rewards my dear, whatever might you mean?”

“A surprise it shall be when appropriate is the time.” Im stands and walks out of Villi’s chambers, leaving him to his fantasies. Im is a highly sought-after receiver. Her intellect, confidence and achievements are greater than most. Her social skills also give her a grace and demeanor that attracts high-powered providers. As Villi knows how to wield his power and influence to get what he wants, so too does Im know how to use hers. Letting Villi think he is the master of his own fate right now is her choice.

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“Tam, copies of Lord Onor’s address have you made?”

“Yes, Im, completed ten disks are.”

“Enough that should be. Keep three I will; you deposit the rest as planned. Be sure Inspector Wa has a copy. Time it is to let him know of our plan. Tomorrow, present I will my discussion topics for the first day of House meetings. Review mine Lord Villi surely will.”

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Drayga presents the legislative schedule to Lord Villi. He quickly leafs through the pages until he finds Im's topics. Stopping at the last item on her list, he wipes his fingers across the lines as if trying to erase them. "This cannot be, this cannot be. Drayga, a meeting with Im set up."

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Im arranges the recorder and writing materials on Lord Onor's table and places a replica bust of the late Lord so that it faces the visitor's pedestals. She glances toward Tam's pod for assurance and smiles, knowing he will be watching.

Lord Villi and Drayga march into the chambers and up to Im's table.

"Welcome to my chambers Lord Villi, Drayga." Im nods politely at Drayga, who is no longer her equal. He does not return her nod. "For what reason such an urgent meeting, you have requested?" Im politely asks, maintaining a soft confident pose as Lord Villi watches her readjust Onor's bust so that it sits directly facing him.

Villi's mouth twists vilely as he spits out, "What is this presentation of Lord Onor's address in defense of the Preserve statute?"

"To give the address he prepared in his honor I shall. It seems only proper and most respectful, wouldn't you agree."

“Impossible. From what do you base this address? Of his address there were no copies discovered.”

“Why would you think that, good Lord? Like you, very cautious he was and a copy of the last draft he gave to me. All of the important comments he was to make it contains. Present it I will. Please have a seat.”

Villi casts a long serious gaze at Drayga who is staring blankly at Im. “We won’t stay long. Where is the copy you say you have?” Villi turns his gaze back on Im’s calm confident face.

She reaches into her shoulder bag. “Lord Villi, your information that there were no copies of his speech, from where did you get it, do tell me? Such a thing from Inspector Wa I did not hear.” Im lays the disk on the desk beside the bust.

Staring at the disk, Villi looks back at Drayga, then down at Im, “That there were concerns that material was stolen from Lord Onor’s domicile, Chief Teldar advised me. An extra copy of that disk do you have?”

“Strange it is that Inspector Wa would not have to me this mentioned. An extra I have, a copy to review you would like?”

“How very kind of you that would be. How many copies do you have might I ask?” Villi smiles kindly.



“At my domicile, this and one other I have. Why do you ask?” Im glances at Drayga as she slides the disk toward Lord Villi.

Picking up the disk, Villi slips it into his belt pack. “Dear Im, of course out of caution. A shame it would be for these last words of such a great Lord to be lost. Don’t you agree Drayga?”

“A pity it would be.” Drayga smiles coldly at Im, his eyes widening and nostrils flaring to catch her reaction. Im remains calm. The years of tutelage under Lord Onor had groomed her for these moments.

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“Drayga, to your people talk. Talk to Teldar I will. The other disk by tomorrow we need.” Resolve is etched across Villi’s face. “Have them we must at all cost. Votes are close, as you know. Allow her we cannot to turn one more Lord against our proposal as Onor would have been able to do.”

“Yes my Lord, have them you shall, but what if extreme measures must be taken with the new Lord? If termination is necessary, it may be too much of a coincidence for Teldar to fix.”

“With Teldar you let me deal; much to lose he will have, if passing this legislation fails.” Villi stomps into his chamber. “Care of your people take and that disk get me.”

“My Lord, done it is.”

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“Im, in your sleeping pod Tam and I will be. Ready for this you are?”

“Yes, Inspector. Rest in the living area and practice the address I will.” Im smiles at Tam and touches his cheek, recognizing his fear for her. “Tam, fine I will be. And near me I will not let anyone if they come. Trust I do, that protect me you and Wa will.” Tam touches her hand on his cheek and nods acceptance that this must be done. Yet uncertainty is written over his face and Im smells his fear for her. She feels warm with Tam.

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Im is lounging under the lone reading light as the timepiece clicks on twenty-seven increments. Soon the sun will rise. The visitors chime sounds, startling Im from her dozing. Tam jumps to his feet but Inspector Wa raises his hand for him to stay in place. Wa inspects his stun rod, turns it on and charges it. They hear Im speak into the intercom. “At this time who is calling?”

“Security, Lord Im. Sent to check on you we have been.”

“Fine I am, thank you.”

“Come in we must to make sure or your situation the Chief will not accept.”

“Chief who?”

“Teldar, Lord Im, who else would send us at this time? Only a few minutes we shall be to assure all with you is safe.”

Im touches the OPEN button. The door latch releases and it slides open. Three providers storm in with official-looking collars, Im immediately can smell their hostility. They are Villi’s. She watches them look around the room, noses flared. “Officers you are not. What is it you want? Leave now you must,” Im says loud enough for Tam and Inspector Wa to hear.

The three surround Im. The one directly in front of her face snarls, “All of your disks we must have.”

“All? Even my music and play disks?” Im smiles quizzically at the alleged officer.

“Those of Lord Onor’s address only.”

“Who sent you for this?”

“Not of your business, Lord Im, but very powerful they are, and have them they will.”

“Or what?” Defiance laces Im’s voice and penetrates her stare at her antagonist.

“A great lost to your Region Lord Im it would be to have two leaders so quickly lost.”

“Lord Onor was terminated by your hands you say? Pay for this you shall.” Inspector Wa and Tam listen to Im bate her prey into confessing, ready to strike.

“Not I. Not us. Not close enough to your good Lord would we be able to get. But, close enough we are to you to inject you with Teeten berry extract to silently stop your life function. Very undetectable by the infirmary. Quite a useful tool it is. Turn over the disk you must and we shall leave. And say nothing of this night, or at a time least expecting, introduced to the Teeten berry extract you will be.” The talker holds his hand out, wiggling his fingers like a young being begging.

Im announces loudly, “Time it is.” On her signal, Tam throws open the sleeping pod door and Inspector Wa jumps out with the stun rod held forward ready to take down any of the three intruders who make an aggressive move.

“Move not.” Wa barks and Tam moves behind the intruder nearest him ready to seize. “Show me credentials. Authorized were you to do this by who?” He motions for Im to move from inside their ring around her. The intruder behind her grabs her and starts to shuffle to the door. As Wa moves toward them, the intruder pushes Im toward Wa and bolts out the door. Seeing their opportunity, the other two try to make it to the door. Tam grapples with the one he was standing behind and Inspector Wa spears the other with the stun rod, sending him quivering to the floor. He watches for an opportunity to stun the other without accidentally stunning Tam. As they spin around knocking over

furniture, Im spots that the intruder has a syringe in his hand and grabs his arm before he can plunge it into Tam. Wa stuns the second intruder, crumpling him to the floor. “Stay here, to find the third one I will try.”

Im falls into Tam’s arms, shaking with fear and the realization of just how close they had come to termination. Tam holds her tightly, grateful for her quick reaction when she saw the needle.

Inspector Wa reappears through the doorway. “Find him I cannot. Far away, he is by now. But these two we have. Interrogate them here we shall, not the station. Learn more that way perhaps we can.” Wa turns the talker over who is fully awake but partially paralyzed. “Sent here were you by who?”

The talker shakes his head, and Wa inspects both of the intruders’ belt pouches for identification, but finds none. “You are who?” The talker shakes his head again.

“Of these stun rods do you know?”

“Yes.”

“So you can speak. Then you know what I can do with them, correct?”

“Yes.” The talker acknowledges in a low tone.

Inspector Wa turns the rotary dial around the stick to increase the charge. “Sent here by whom, were you?” He waves the rod over the talker’s face, whose eyes blink rapidly and his stench of fear permeates Im’s domicile. “No answer still. Leave now you and Tam should, no witnesses will be best. The syringe the other one dropped give to me.”

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“Im, more dangerous than expected this has become. In jeopardy your safety is if here we stay. Go we must to the Cool Side, immediately.”

“Not yet, Tam, first prepare a story of what we know and to the Communicator to broadcast we must give it. Stop them Villi cannot. Get it to them soon and they will have it on the nationwide system before the House tomorrow meets. If go we must, then let us assure that the Lords and the people read Lord Onor’s address, and know of what tonight we learned. To record these events, where can we go that will be safe?” Tam senses weariness from Im. The events of the past three days are beginning to chip away at her large reserve of energy.

“Best it is directly to the offices of the Communicator to go. Suspect us of being there no one will. If they do, coming after us there they would not. While to them you explain the story, passes for the Lev-Shuttle to the Cool Side I will get.”

“Where will we go there? Find us they will if to our home domiciles we go.”

“Not where we will go. A domicile at the base of Bal, on the high plains, my father’s brother has. Look for us there no one will. Welcome they will not be if they do come. On the high plains Lord Villi’s name is a hated.”

Stepping off the City Shuttle, Im and Tam scan the walkways before walking the short distance to the entranceway of the Communicator’s main office building. One of three major media organizations on the island, the Communicator, founded on the Cool Side, has a bias for the region’s issues. Their reach is island-wide print and televised communications. Lord Onor was highly revered by the staff and ownership, the reason why Im and Tam have come to them to tell their story.

Recognizing their familiar faces, the guard at the security desk politely asks, “How can I help you?”

“Lord Im this is, the newly appointed replacement for the dearly departed Lord Onor. Speak immediately with Senti she needs to,” Tam explains. Senti is the late day editor overseeing the Front Side news operations, someone Im and Tam know well.

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“Lord Im, news of your appointment we received a few increments ago. Congratulations, we offer you. Indeed a good choice, Lord Villi has made. Express our deepest regrets I do. Lord Onor was a great leader...” Senti bows his head, his voice trailing off as he finishes.

“Senti, know we do how close your friendship with the Lord was. For your kind words most sincere thanks we give. What we are here to discuss, truly troubling you will find. For your assistance with a most urgent matter we need to ask.” Senti senses the seriousness of Tam’s words.

“Your need, what is it?”

“Explain I will; passes to get us to safety on the Cool Side Tam has to buy.” Im’s tone is sober and her eyes reflect calm resolve.

Senti sits upright behind his table, shock covering his face. “Safety? A Lord of the House needs to flee to the Cool Side for safety, why?”

“A story there is to tell. Turn on your recorder you should.” Im began soberly. Tam nods to them and leaves.

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“Im, if know you so well I did not, suspect I would, the Calli berry juice you have been drinking.” Senti slowly shakes his head in disbelief. (Calli berry juice is a fermented drink that is very popular in the Subsidy projects, domicile of the growing population of the shalomans of low capacity.)

“One more thing there is to discuss.” Im pulls the recorder disk from her shoulder pack and slides it across the table to Senti. “Lord Onor’s address to the house this is.



Published before the House congregates for final discussions about the Preserve vote, this we want.”

“In the Sunrise Telecomm report this can be done and in scribe report in the late day.”

“Good, that will do. When Tam arrives back, go I must. Have you any further questions of me?”

“None at this time, Lord Im. Realize you must, that the story of Villi’s involvement with Lord Onor’s passage I cannot report. No clear evidence is there that it is so. Talk to Inspector Wa later I will, to learn of his discoveries from the two he is holding from your assault. Tam is now here.” Senti looks past Im toward the entrance to the office area.

Im rotates her head 180 degrees and smiles as she watches Tam weave his way among the staff worktables. She sighs gently in recognition of the journey ahead of them. It has been a long time since she has had the opportunity to rejuvenate her system with rest, and now they must travel.

“Im, go we must immediately, to meet the transport. Thank you, Senti, in touch we will be. What is needed for the story I trust you have?” Tam remains standing.

“A story it is. Happy I am that you are safe, but safe on the transport will you be?”

“Spoken with his contractor by now, the one who escaped will surely have. To know what they know it is difficult, or what they might next do. Leave soon we must to reduce

our risk by them of our being found.” The look of worry in Tam’s eyes does not escape Senti.

“Two of my security staff, take with you. Stay with you until you arrive in the Cool Side they can. Wire ahead I will to our office there to have someone meet you.”

“Someone meeting us there I have, for the thought Senti, we give thanks. Accepted is an escort to the transport.” Tam nods to Im and she nods her agreement back.

Senti calls his aide in and gives him a note. “Lord Im, meet you at the front desk the security staff will. Nothing of your destination you should tell them.” Im and Tam acknowledge his advice and shuffle quickly to pick up their escorts.

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Drayga hurries into Lord Villi’s office, panic reflecting in his eyes. “Lord, are you not listening to the Sunrise Communications? To the Communicator site quickly tune it.” Alarm resonates in his voice.

“What is it that panics you so?” the Lord quizzes, as he switches on the Communicator Telecomm program.

“Listen and you shall understand.” Drayga glares at the Telecomm box, listening to the authoritative voice reciting Lord Onor’s address.

“Who is this speaking? What is this about?” Lord Villi sputters irritably as he stares at the box.

“Reading Lord Onor’s address to the House a narrator is. Im and Tam must have given a copy of it to the Communicator.”

They both listen silently. “...A dangerous precedent it will be to make any change to the Codex. Far more dangerous it will be this particular change to make. Against the unpredictable and uncontrollable environment The Preserve is our security ...”

“Hearing this address before the House the whole nation is.” Villi’s voice rises.

“More there is. Earlier, three security staff, allegedly sent by Teldar to confiscate the disk of the address, assaulted Lord Im they reported. A trap they set for them.

“They set?”

“Tam, Im and Inspector Wa.”

“Inspector Wa?”

“Correct, and Inspector Wa. Able he was to secure two of the violators, but one got away, without the disk. Lord Villi, threatened Im they did with the Teeten berry extract,” Drayga nervously explains.

“Those fools,” Lord Villi whispers.

“Now, requesting a conference with you at the earliest possible time Lord Windal and Min are.”

“What now do those old fools want?” Villi snarls.

“Come they do to request delaying the vote and deliberations on your recommendation until the investigation is complete.”

“Investigation?”

“Yes, Lord. Requesting a full investigation of Lord Onor’s passage and the threat to Lord Im the Communicator is.”

“Yes, I suppose they would, wouldn’t they. A request do prepare to Teldar for this investigation to begin. Request him to come to my chambers this matter to discuss. Then assemble the House members immediately. Form we shall, a council to seek the truth in this matter. Be sure on the Council Lord Im is,” Lord Villi orders, intending to seize control of the situation before it gets out of his control.

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Im stares at Tam as he watches the buildings and domiciles of Front Side City flick by the window. The levitated train gathers speed for the five-increment journey to the Cool Side. Tam has always been her trusted friend and guardian since they joined Lord Onor's staff. The events over the past sixty increments have forged an even deeper meaning for their relationship, at least for Im. She wonders, as she savors the fragrance of his calm, if he feels the same.

Im takes Tam's right arm, loops it around her neck, lays her head into his neck and closes her eyes. For the first time in two sunrises, she is able to relax her system for rejuvenation. Tam lays his chin on her head, savoring her warm scent, admiring her resolve and daring in the effort to find justice and continue Lord Onor's mission. He feels warm for Im.

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The late day Communicator Scribe gives a full accounting of Im and Tam's encounter with the intruders. It includes Lord Villi and Chief Teldar's intentions to get a final answer for this shame on the nation. A full page read of Lord Onor's address:

Honorable Lords of the House, stand before you I do to address the most serious matter being brought to a vote in the history of the House. The matter pending before you is not simply an addendum to the Codex; a fundamental change of the Codex it is. The wisdom of the writer's of the Codex has withstood the test of time, our nation admirably served by it.

To change the Codex in order to allow harvesting of Lamzool in the Preserve the proposal presented to us by Lord Villi is. The precious source of all our energy, the slow maturing bush enabling the quality of our lives to improve, Lamzool is. The Life blood of our industries and transportation net work Lamzool is. Foremost in the thoughts of our Founders was the importance of Lamzool to our nation when in the Codex the Preserve was set.

As a precaution to any form of catastrophe occurring in the annual production of Lamzool, The Founders set aside the Preserve. For all production of this precious commodity our only seed stock the Preserve is. Twice since the establishment of the Codex, our Nation has witnessed such catastrophic events in which vital to our very survival the Preserve was. Well known history it is.

Let me now discuss the motives, the body and the consequences of the changes to the Preserve Clause in the Codex Lord Villi's proposes.

Twenty circuits past the well-intended Subsidy Law Lord Villi was able to secure. This we all know, to improve the standard of living for shalomans of lesser capabilities the subsidy was intended. At the outset, the number of Shalomans in this category, less than eight percent of the population, a small number, it was. Less than two percent of our national budget the cost of the Subsidy represented. The number of shalomans receiving the subsidy has grown to over twelve percent of the population since passage. Expansion of the subsidy from the initial financial payment to now including sustenance, domicile and systems care, overwhelmed the budget has become. Ten percent, the costs now exceed.

How did this occur, ourselves we should ask?

Administrators of these programs found their careers in the Subsidy and their futures dependent upon the size and scope of the Subsidy growing. The Subsidy qualification slowly expanded to more participants included. Expanding their families, the participants understood, meant more subsidies resulting in a population explosion in this category, the number qualifying for the subsidy expanding. Pressure on our administrative costs, domicile costs, sustenance costs, systems care costs, and the cost of educating are all increasing. Paid for this we have, how? Taxes, and most of the taxes are put on the energy sector ever increasing. The cost of energy to all of our citizens this caused to increase. An indirect tax on all Shalomans it has become.

Now, with the population explosion in the subsidy category, our energy consumption we have pushed of our current Lamzool capacity to the limits. Schools struggle to deal with the increasing number of lesser capable offspring entering the system. Whole sections of major cities now house the subsidy population, and are falling into disrepair, and in these sections the spreading Calli berry abuse has become a major problem with this group, resulting in crime increasing.

Efforts by the subsidy Administration to bring these trends under control have largely failed in spite of their continued requests for more staff and resources, which provided reluctantly we have. Yet the trends continue, which brings us to why Lord Villi's proposal was presented.

To produce more energy upon which to tax, to raise the resources to continue to support his expanding subsidy costs, Lord Villi needs to have access to the Lamzool in the Preserve. Although his proposal initially requests access to only ten percent of the Preserve, once the Codex is changed to open up access, it will only be a matter of time until more access will be required.

A dangerous precedent it will be to make any change to the Codex. Far more dangerous it will be for this particular change to make. Our security against the unpredictable, uncontrollable environment the Preserve is. If we deplete the Lamzool in the Preserve, it may be impossible from a disastrous crop year to quickly recover. In fact, to recover at all, impossible it might be. The Lamzool in the Preserve is abundant, and it should remain the way our Founders prescribed.

The answer to the subsidy problem is to end the incentives created by the subsidy causing the expansion of the number of participants, the exploding population growth and costs, both in resources and energy that it brings. The answer to Lord Villi's problem is not opening the Preserve, it is Lord Villi's Subsidy program ending.

My fellow Lords, let the Codex stand.

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Drayga enters Lord Villi's chambers and sees the Lord bent over the Communicator Scribe. Lord Villi looks up, fury in his eyes, "Terminated the Preserve vote is. Where is Im?"



“Into seclusion in fear for her safety Lord Im and Tam have fled.”

“Where has she gone? A Lord of the House fleeing to save her life will not to the citizens look good.” Villi’s tone tempers to the political implications.

“No one knows where, but most assuredly to the Cool Side they went.”

“Tell your people to find them.” Villi spits.

## Chapter 2