

ELLANDRA

A STORY OF THE HAILLAR DOMINION

Copyright 2020 T.S. Alexander
Published by T.S. Alexander at Smashwords

Copyright Notes

This book is a work of fiction. All characters and events portrayed in this series are fictional and any resemblance with real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

ELLANDRA and The Haillar Metaverse are copyright © 2020 by T.S. Alexander, all rights reserved under US and International copyright conventions.

This book or parts thereof may not be reproduced in any form, stored in any retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the author, except as provided by United States of America copyright law. The use of characters and concepts specific to The Haillar Metaverse is not allowed without author's written consent.

For permission requests, please contact the author via email at:

ts.alexander8@gmail.com

Cover image: Book Brush Cover Creator

Smashwords Edition Notes

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your enjoyment only, then please return to Smashwords.com or your favorite retailer and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Table of Contents

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Haillar Queens & Great Houses](#)

[About Author and Series](#)

Chapter One

Dorien Sector - twelve Terran years before the Aldeean Siege

“Make way for Dersinomer, esteemed Archon of the planet Caldeor.”

I took two steps to the left, barely avoiding a crash with the standard-bearer. The overdressed driang ignored me entirely and stepped through the gate, his master following through equally nonplussed. Six guards wearing ornamental cuirasses, but very functional pikes marched in step behind them. The closest one threw me a scathing look as if my presence on the portal dais was an offence to the departing bureaucrat.

I let them pass, then stepped back on the ramp descending toward the middle of the hall. The Caldeor exchange was an airy chamber decorated with warm colours, conveying a feeling of freedom somehow appropriate for an avian race like the driang. The bird staring at me from an alcove at the end of the ramp was anything but warm, though.

“Place your hand on the identification crystal,” grunted the border guard, adding belatedly: “Please.”

The driang were our oldest partners in the Dominion, yet a bunch of arrogant assholes, nevertheless. Oh, they were respectful enough in their dealings with Sen’Haillar upper echelons, but their courtesy did not extend to ordinary Dominion citizens. And a freshly minted Third Level Legate was a Haillar as ordinary as they came.

While putting my right hand on the reader, I handed my employment token with the left. The officer inserted it in a slot on his console and peeked to a screen invisible from my side of the desk.

“Name?”

“Ellandra Deluan.”

“Age?”

“Twenty-one cycles.” And change, I added silently in my mind. No need to share this latest thought with the surly avian.

“Where did you come from?”

“Tao Bellona, the Dominion’s Capital”

“Reason for your visit?”

“I was assigned as junior legate with the Haillar Embassy on Caldeor.”

I’m sure the avian had all this information on the screen in front of his beak. He pinned me with a fixed birdlike stare nevertheless, as if my very presence there, in front of him was breaking the law. I watched him back with wide, innocent eyes, trying to look as harmless as I

could possibly be. I was the naïve Haillar girl taking her first steps on her own into the world out there.

The guard was unimpressed. These planet's border officers probably went through specialised training specifically designed to make them look unfriendly. Or maybe they were naturally ill-disposed towards any trespassers, especially of the non-driang kind.

“I need to see the contents of your duffel.”

Wordlessly, I emptied my bag on his desk. A pair of robes, a jerkin, breeches, toiletries. Nothing conspicuous, not even a reading tablet. I was expected mistrust, and I came accordingly prepared.

With a sour face, the officer handed me the token and waved me through. I took great pleasure meticulously refolding my belongings to the avian's great annoyance. Sometimes I could be as petty as any other wronged Haillar woman. But I prided myself I was able to always pick the appropriate time and place.

“Miss Deluan?”

“Ellandra! Ellandra Deluan!”

That would be me.

My mind was wandering, so I missed the initial call. I hadn't used my original surname for quite a while, so I momentarily failed to react. Wake up Ellandra, your training break is over!

The person calling me was a young Haillar male, only a few cycles older than me. I stopped and turned, measuring him discreetly. He was tall, at least a head taller than me and looked to be trim and fit. His dark blue eyes were his most striking feature, bright and shiny, nicely complemented by blue facial patterns and hair accents. A shade of midnight blue I've rarely seen in a Haillar. Not what I expected when meeting a diplomat attaché on one of the most reclusive driang worlds in the entire Dorien Sector.

“Ellandra? Welcome to Caldeor. I'm Sandrial Avrido, a fellow low-level assistant with the Diplomatic Corps, odd job man for the local Haillar Mission and your brother in misery for the foreseeable future.”

Most definitely not your run of the mill career diplomat! And an underwhelming recommendation for my future workplace, if I ever heard one.

“That bad, huh?”

“Well, I'm exaggerating a bit. It has its moments, such as being sent to welcome you, for example.”

I gave him a long glance, shaking my head. Really? Trying to flirt with me moments after we'd met?

“It's not that bad” continued my guide on a more serious note, “but definitely not the choicest assignment in this galactic sector. You might have noticed that our hosts have a real knack for making foreigners feel unwelcome.”

We exited the Exchange, and I had my first glimpse of this driang world. An airy cityscape dominated by high rises, not surprisingly for an avian race. Millions of cycles ago the driangs' forefathers used to be daylight predators, like falcons and eagles on the Haillar worlds, and to date the entire species was still fond of dazzling heights and open vistas. Too bad their views were not as broad when it came to any cross-species interaction.

“Our enclave is within walking distance, so we can have a pleasant stroll and get to know each other at the same time. Allow me to take your duffel, my Lady.”

I was perfectly capable of carrying my bag, yet more than willing to pass it to my new acquaintance. Who was I to discourage my colleague's chivalrous behaviour?

“So, legate Avrido, have you been on Caldeor for long? By the sound of it, you've been around for ages.”

“I apologise if my words gave you this impression, Mistress Deluan. I really do. Bickering is a time-honoured tradition at the Caldeor Haillar Mission, as no doubt you would soon have the opportunity to discover yourself. No, I haven't been here for long. I joined less than a cycle ago, just before the last Festival of Darkness.”

More like half a cycle ago, in this case. The Festival of Darkness was an ancient tradition celebrating mid-winter on our long lost homeworld. We were now close to the Festival of Light which was only twenty-odd days away. A time of joy and celebration for all the Haillar, wherever they might be. I wondered if I'd still be around in twenty days, for this messy situation should be over by then, and whoever thought it was a good idea to sell us out should be dead.

The Haillar mission occupied the entire ground floor of a low building in one of the less travelled parts of the trade district. Though low was a relative term. On Dorien or even Tao Bellona, a fifty-odd floors tower will be considered reasonably tall. Here it was dwarfed by slender skyscrapers rising hundreds of strides into the air and crisscrossed with open bridges. Either this planet was entirely wind-free, or the driang idea of a good time was facing the gale on a narrow perch, without a railing or any other safety. Of course, they could fly, so it wasn't as bad as it sounded.

Our arrival was met with a perfunctory nod by one of the two troopers guarding the door, while the other ignored us altogether. The talkative one sported the Order symbol on his chest, while his comrade was attuned to Chaos. Dorien household troops both of them, likely a bonded pair. Some of the best guards in the entire Dominion.

Inside, we came into a large atrium, brightly lit by a transparent ceiling, an enormous window into a verdant open space. So, this tower had an empty core made into an internal glasshouse. A place where the residents could relax in the open and fly up and down at their leisure. A common driang architectural feature, though again modest compared to the aerial jungles I'd seen elsewhere. I couldn't imagine the falcon-like avians living in this place being very happy to fly in a relatively confined pit, even if wide by Haillar standards and fifty stories tall.

“I'll take you to the Diplomatic Office to meet the others,” said my guide. No doubt The First Legate, Ambassador Hardun, would want to talk with you and give you the house rules.”

“Don’t worry,” he continued seeing my panicked expression. “It was intended as a joke. Delora Hardun is not that bad. For a Senior Diplomat, at least.”

Was that supposed to be encouraging?

The Diplomatic Office was an open plan working space with two lateral partitions at either end. Crystals and screens were arrayed on every desk, and a dozen men and women were busy doing whatever the embassy officers were supposed to do. My alleged day job, I assumed.

“I’ll introduce you later. Let’s meet the First Legate, to begin with,” said Sandrial taking a left turn, while nervously glancing to the opposite partition.

“What’s happening? Do you keep a flagar beast in there?”

“Good guess! That’s the lair of the Winter Witch.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“The offices of our esteemed Ortens Sen’Galahad, our local Resident Adept.”

On a foreign world, the Resident was effectively the head of the local Sen’Haillar Chapter and hence the head of all the eka wielding adepts working on the planet. While the First Legate was nominally leading the diplomatic mission, the Resident was on point for any military issue. He or she also took care of anything related to the interests of the local Suzerain House. In our case, the Sen’Dorien House.

It was a rather complicated arrangement, both between the First Legate and the leading Adept and between the Sen Haillar Houses and our hosts, the driang. The birds were fully independent masters of Caldeor, yet nominally under the protection of one of the Haillar queens, and hence retainers of her House. A millennia-old arrangement that suited the driang quite well, for never in sixty-odd thousand cycles had a Haillar queen interfered into the affairs of a Nest.

Shouted words erupted briefly from the Resident’s office, and a stout elderly woman stepped out abruptly heading directly towards us. The other side of the argument remained invisible in the confines of her sanctuary. Such a shocking lack of restraint was almost unheard of for my race. The Haillar always took pride in being calm and composed, no matter the circumstances.

The woman, First Legate Delora Hardun, stopped short of entering her office and turned to us with a scowl on her face.

“Legate Assistant Deluan. I was expecting you, although much earlier today.”

I wasn’t aware I was late, so I threw a confused glance towards Sandrial. I must have looked as helpless as I intended, for my guide was quick to defend me despite his apparent reluctance to confront his boss.

“Miss Deluan was almost on time, First Legate. She was indeed briefly retained by the driang gate controllers, but if anything, I’m the one to blame for insisting us to walk all the way from the Exchange.”

I was impressed. Not only dashing but also a real gentleman ready to take a blast in defence of a lady. I must admit, such thoughts were entirely inappropriate for a woman of my station, if perfectly normal for someone my age.

“That would be all, Assistant Avrido,” said the ambassador, sending my friend away. “Miss Deluan, I’d like to have a word with you for a moment.”

I followed her in her rooms, closing the doors behind me. Whatever she had to say, I doubt she wanted to be overheard by all her subordinates. I was surprised if she wasn’t concerned about losing face, after the odd display earlier on.

“Miss Deluan, you must realise your posting here is entirely unusual,” began the head of the Caldeor mission. “As a matter of fact, you, a recent graduate with no practical experience, are the last-minute replacement of a junior diplomat I happen to know and respect.”

Oops, not exactly my best introduction! I suspected that Verdid was aware of this but couldn’t care less. A minor inconvenience for me to deal with.

I tried to protest my innocence, but the Legate stopped me with a hand gesture.

“Please don’t bother. I’m good enough at my job to have a hint of who you probably are, and why you showed up here at this particular time. I might even agree with the reasons, but this doesn’t necessarily mean I had to like this entire charade.”

I very much doubted at least one of her statements, but I was glad she was aware of the coming storm. Providing, of course, that she wasn’t the one that brought it on Caldeor in the first place. I strongly doubted that was the case, but one never knows. People change.

“I’m here to help,” I respond curtly. It was a non-answer that could have meant either that I agreed with Delora, or that I didn’t have a clue what she was talking about. Evasion was always better than an outright lie. Much easier to keep track of what you said if you didn’t need to remember the falsehoods.

“I have no doubt about it”, replied the ambassador in a dry tone. “On this note, tomorrow morning you’ll accompany me to a discussion with the esteemed Archon Erdolminer, the driang in charge with sub-orbital defence and most ardent supporter of the Huynar development. I guess you’ll find this discussion informative.”

Delora Hardun fixed me with a hard stare for a moment, then started to fiddle with a com crystal letting me know in no uncertain terms that this interview was over. I considered for a moment telling her everything, telling her that we had actually met before. Telling her that we were even friends, some other time, in some other life. But people do change, and there would be time for remembrance later, when this crisis would have come to pass.

“Let me invite you to a cup of tea and also an opportunity to meet some of our colleagues. The attendants will take your luggage to your quarters. No need to worry about that.”

A cup of tea was just what I needed, so I took Sandrial up on his offer. In any event, getting to know the diplomatic team was the next priority on my agenda.

The canteen doubling as a tea parlour was within the embassy. A lovely little terrace open to the internal garden reminding me of some of my favourite places on Tao Bellona. The place was half full, as it was close to the customary early-evening meal, at the end of the office time.

“This is the finest and only place on Caldeor where we can come together for a tea or a meal,” my new friend informed me. “The birds are not keen on inter-species interaction, so all places outside are off-limits to us. They don’t serve anything edible, in any case.”

I could see how this would quickly become tedious, though at first glance the place looked charming enough. Details like this could make life annoying and probably accounted in no small degree for my compatriots’ misery. Well, at least today my presence could bring a sense of novelty, the break in the daily routine that could be enough to lighten their mood.

My favourite embassy assistant led me to an occupied table, where three men and a woman were already sipping copious amounts of sejuna tea.

“My dear friends”, started Sandrial. “Please meet Ellandra Deluan, the newest member of our band of exiles and now officially the most junior Legate in our team.”

I took a seat and poured a generous portion of tea, then looked around, quickly assessing my new colleagues. Two middle-aged males, one very prim and proper, the other one a solid guy, probably ex-military. A young man, slightly older than Sandrial, possibly another assistant. The woman, likely a decade older than him, with light teal bangs and discrete face patterns.

“Are you coming directly from Tao Bellona?” asked the solid Haillar in a pretty blunt way. Another way of saying: Are you coming straight from the academy?

Well, I did arrive from the Dominion Capital, and being a fresh graduate was my cover story.

“Indeed, my dear sir. Forgive me, I don’t know your name and Corps designation.”

The protocol would require for all of them to introduce themselves and provide their Diplomatic Corps status. But in this case, as I was clearly the most junior person, some believed they could dispense of the customary introductions.

“I’m Ajden Halora, Second Legate,” responded the ex-soldier, then probably remembered his manners and continued pointing to his colleagues. “My friend Quars Mendina, also Second Legate and young Prion Alora, one of our Assistants. The lady is Amiren Klern, responsible with Mission logistics, no Corps designation.”

Each of the three nodded in turn, acknowledging their introduction. They seemed to be a regular bunch of Mission staffers, the older males mid-rank officers, the younger, embassy assistants. No rising stars, no laggards either.

“Tell me my dear”, intervened the supply officer. “What are the latest rumours from Bellona. We receive daily news, of course, but rarely visitors. And we well know the most interesting bits are not in the Lore House reports, neither to be discussed by com portal.”

The lady was fishing for some gossip, at the same time alluding she was well attuned with the Capital’s grapevine. Unfortunately, I wasn’t, so I had no clue what exactly she was looking for.

Seeing my confusion, the clerk realised she had to be more specific.

“I mean, any end in sight for the Interim? Not that we complain about Queen Reith Sen’Dorien, but as you know, Caldeor is her Sister’s. Things haven’t been the same since the death of the old Chaos Queen.”

This was a flimsy excuse if I ever heard one. It couldn't matter one way or another for the Embassy on Caldeor which of the Dorian sisters was managing the House's affairs. As a matter of fact, I was pretty sure that Reith Sen'Dorien, the Order Queen, was a better administrator for the Haillar affairs on this planet than her Chaos sister, its nominal Suzerain.

"Nothing was officially agreed, but I'd be surprised if it lasts long beyond the Festival of Light," I responded. Typically, the time between a queen's death and her re-ascension was roughly sixty days, and more than half of this time had passed since the date Xendara, the last embodiment of the Chaos Queen, had passed away.

My curious colleague nodded wisely, as if I was sharing some unique insight. I wondered how well connected to the Capital she was, or if all of this dialogue was just an attempt to impress Sandrial. She was definitely more interested in looking at him than in whatever piece of trivia I had to say.

Chapter Two

Back in my room, I unpacked my duffel and arranged the contents in the various drawers. While doing this I realised that the seal I placed when slowly repacking my belongings in front of the border guard was now gone. Apparently while I was introducing myself to various people someone had taken the time to check my luggage.

Well, good luck to them! I didn't have anything suspicious in my bag, or better said nothing that didn't look like it belonged there.

I took a seat at the narrow desk and placed the framed image of my fictitious family in front of me, within an arm's length. A plain crystal and carbon rectangle, not unlike millions other cheap memorabilia sold pretty much everywhere on the Dominion worlds. Reaching into my Core, I let a tiny tendril of eka raise and touch the object, overwriting its atomic structure with an entirely different pattern. The frame image started to flow like wax, rebuilding itself into a crystalline structure, lit with the tell-tale halo of a long-range communication portal. I might not be an expert in Matter manipulation but reforming a device back into its initial configuration was simple enough.

One more eka push sent a signal to the other end, promptly acknowledged moments later.

"I'm in," I informed the Spy Mistress laconically. Verdid was not prone to chit-chat when in business mode, something I learned to respect a long time ago.

"Any insights?" responded my comrade and friend in an equally concise way.

"The ambassador has a dysfunctional relationship with her Resident Adept, and somebody was curious enough to mess with my things. Nothing conclusive, I'm afraid."

"I was informed another suspicious communication occurred today between the Huynar Station and the kreussa fleet hidden half a light day away from Caldeor. The fifth of its kind we know about, and the third in the past couple of days. Whatever happens, expect to happen fast."

I acknowledged the message and cut the discussion short. I didn't have a couple of ten-days. I might not even have a day to sort out who was bringing a mercenary fleet at Caldeor and for what nefarious purpose. Was it just a driang power play, or something much worse than that? Caldeor was far from the Wall, far from the frontlines of the Scourge War, and their ships couldn't possibly hope to cross half of the Dominion undetected. Yet, someone thought the kreussa could. The lizard race was a neutral party in theory, though various factions continuously allied with our hated Enemy and with us, in an ever-shifting pattern of loyalties.

Well, I guess the first step to gain an answer to my questions was meeting a certain Archon Erdolminer, the esteemed driang responsible for Calderon's orbital defence.

I watched myself in the mirror to check how the other saw me. I wasn't a vain person, or at least I didn't think I was. I was still adjusting to my new role, and I had to feel comfortable in my own skin.

The girl in the mirror looked back with huge black eyes rimmed with purple. Matching facial patterns adorned my face, almost the same shade as the eyes and the accents in my hair. I wasn't accustomed to such prominent marks, but I must admit they looked good and I could understand why Sandrial seemed to be inclined to flirt with me.

I might be a vain person, after all!

Focus Ellandra Deluan! Tomorrow you'll have a long day in front of you.

The esteemed Erdolminer, as any high ranking Caldeor bureaucrat, had his working offices close to his nest at the very top of one of the downtown high rises. Did I mention that the driang had no use for elevators in their residential towers, seeing them as a sign of decadence inspired by us, the alien races? Any visitor had to climb hundreds of rather steep stairs or suffer the indignity of arriving by air in one of those transports designed to carry supplies, not people. Any self-respecting driang would always fly to his business meetings. A pity that neither First Legate Delora Hardun nor I had wings.

I didn't fly often, but I had no problem doing it. There were no flying contraptions on the Haillar worlds, nor any other form of mechanical transport, for that matter. We didn't need them. Why clutter our streets when anyone can travel by portal to a gate within walking distance of any destination? It wasn't the same on most worlds populated by other races, places where eka devices were not so widespread. Even less so on Caldeor, given the reclusive nature of these charming birds.

So, flying it was, and if our image would suffer because of this, so be it!

We boarded the transport early in the morning, only the two of us, Delora and me. The pilot was a surprisingly social avian, who chatted incessantly about his experiences on different worlds. Apparently, he was well travelled, including a cycle spent on Dorien, the Haillar world giving the name of this Sector. The place of the Chaos Queen's Palace of Glass and hundreds of other marvels.

His words, not mine.

While the trip was more pleasant than expected, our reception was as frosty as it could possibly be, considering Delora's ambassador status.

The esteemed Erdolminer was a plump bird, the first overweight driang I've ever met, and I've seen my share. For Flame's sake, they were supposed to be falcon-like avians, not turkeys! Yet Erdolminer looked like a turkey and behaved like one too, full of bluster and self-importance.

"Caldeor is a world almost as old as the Dominion," he boasted. "We are one of the most important planets in the Dorien Sector, and for sure strong enough to be self-sufficient."

"Of course, Honoured Archon," responded Delora. "Caldeor is an influential power and an important partner for the Haillar and for the House Sen'Dorien in particular. This is one more reason for us to be concerned about its security and always ready to come to your support."

“Your support is welcome, Ambassador, and has been so for sixty thousand cycles. Caldeor respects the Suzerain Queen and thrives under her shield. But we are not a World of the Wall, to be permanently under the threat of a Scourge attack. We are a peaceful colony thousands of cycles away from the frontlines. For us, the only threat is posed by the occasional pirates and smugglers, not by a worldwide siege. By arming the Huynar Station, we’ll project our power in space, and thus relieve Haillar resources better needed elsewhere.”

“Haillar patrols that cost Caldeor nothing.”

“Not directly, Ambassador, but under the Dominion’s Accords, we do provide resupplies and cover the planet-side costs of your crews. But I admit such costs are meagre. This is mainly about our national pride, about being able to defend ourselves from any local threat, without support from the Dominion.”

This was precisely the type of drivel a Scourge drone would utter, and for a moment, I was sure my worst fears were confirmed. Yet, I fed a tendril of eka towards the driang official and I couldn’t feel a thing. No sign of Scourge tampering, no sickening corruption. Erdolminer opinions were his own, and the avian was either as obtuse as it looked, or otherwise involved in his own plot.

“I fear your stance might put your entire planet at risk, Archon,” continued my boss relentlessly. “Non-eka orbital defences had proven to be of limited use in the past, due to the light speed limitations and the sheer distances involved. A fixed platform would always remain a stationary target, while any potential attackers could dance around whatever you can throw at them.”

“That’s not the case here, Madam Ambassador. My colleague Krestellar, the esteemed Head of the Huynar project, assures me the defences he plans to acquire were tested and are every bit as effective as you eka weapons. The jalmaar consortium selling this prototype are long time business partners of exceptional repute.”

The jalmaar were indeed known to be outstanding engineers, and half of the new technologies adopted in the Dominion originated from them. Yet I never knew them to be involved in building weapons, and especially doing so behind our backs.

“In this case, Esteemed Archon, maybe Master Krestellar would not mind arranging a demonstration. If some of these weapons are already on the station, I’m sure it won’t be a big inconvenience to organize a test. Your business partners shouldn’t mind either, for if the weapons are as good as advertised, hundreds of Dominion worlds would be interested in buying them.”

The Archon paused for a second, contacting an underling and asking him to relay our demand. Surprisingly, the answer was received only moments later.

“Your request is acceptable, Madam Ambassador. Station Head Krestellar would be waiting for you and your colleagues tomorrow at noon, and everything would be in place for a demonstration.”

That went surprisingly well. I must admit I didn’t expect the driang to be so cooperative, especially considering the string of concealed messages our spy network detected earlier this week. Addressed to a kreussa fleet, and not to any jalmaar consortium.

The transport took a sharp turn and landed on its designed pad, at the back of the Haillar Embassy building, next to the entrance for supplies deliveries. We thanked the pilot and jumped on the slightly raised platform.

“At least this morning wasn’t a total waste of time,” muttered Delora in a lighter mood. “Tomorrow the two of us, Ortens Sen’Galahad and a squad of guards will pay this Krestellar a visit and see for ourselves the miracle weapons he intends to install in orbit. Maybe adept Sen’Galahad can also make a little demonstration and convince our hosts that dispensing of the Haillar support might not be such a good idea.”

The thought of the local Resident competing with an automatic defence system was slightly ridiculous. For sure this wasn’t something the First Legate was seriously considering, other than as a barb for the local Resident.

I was about to respond when something triggered my instinctive defences. I reacted without thinking raising an Order shield, the first response that came to my mind. The energy blast hit the edge of my defence, dissipating across a barrier made of compressed gases frozen in space and time.

“Look out!” I shouted before the ambassador even had a chance to realise something was happening. “Get down and stay behind me. We are under attack.”

I modified the shield into a perfect semi-sphere, as a precaution against an attack from a different angle. It didn’t come, but a hail of heavy projectiles slammed into the front side of my shield instead, flattening against the air barrier as hard as diamond.

Somebody up there was quick to react and equipped to deal with unforeseen circumstances. Most of the energy shields offered limited protection against kinetic impacts, so an alternate attack stood a fair chance to succeed. It happened that a well-made Order shield was one of the few defences equally effective against both types of weapons, and that I luckily picked this particular response. It wasn’t of course impenetrable, for no defence really was. Still, it seemed the attackers lacked the type of weapons that could bypass this barrier, and they couldn’t mount the firepower needed to overload it.

For the time being, we were safe, but I had no idea where the shooters were. Hence I was in no position to remove them and had to resume myself to maintaining the shield, while blindly sending eka feelers into the buildings ahead.

I needed to try something else.

As if on cue, the two embassy guards turned around the corner and sent a couple of serious blasts of Light and Darkness towards a specific tower, some five hundred strides away. Ah, a Sen’Vollar bonded pair!

I was about to join the military adepts when the attack I thought might never come eventually happened. Somebody opened fire from behind us with an even more powerful kinetic weapon, the blast coming low, almost parallel to the ground. My barrier proved its worth, but the unsuspecting guards stood no chance. Heavy penetrators caught them squarely at chest level, passing through whatever protection they had. The men were literally raised into the air and thrown against the embassy wall, shredded by the high calibre fire.

Such an attack was too powerful to be stealthy. The source proved to be a flying transport, so similar to the one that brought us earlier on, that I initially believed it was the same. A roaring explosion coming from the direction of the landing pad informed me that wasn't the case, and that the driang pilot who had the misfortune to carry us today was one more victim of this cowardly attack.

My own blast enveloped the enemy gunship moments later. I used Order again, mindful of the potential for collateral victims. My favourite weapons were not at all adequate for this place, but Order was one of the most controllable aspects. This didn't make it less deadly, not to mention notoriously difficult to avoid for any non-Haillar target. The enemy vessel froze for a moment, metal, glass and organic matter all turned into crystal. Crystal doesn't fly though, so the statue of the former gunship fell like a rock, shattering in a million crystals.

The penetrator fire suddenly stopped, and an eery silence fell like a curtain over the battleground, in direct contrast with the racket surrounding us mere moments ago. I kept my shield in place and pushed my eka forward, searching for the first team of assassins, the ones targeting us from stealth. I fumbled blindly through the buildings in the general direction of the initial attack, in particular the tower targeted by the embassy guards. I couldn't find anything. Whoever was shooting from the high rises was long gone, and I had nothing on them that would allow me to follow. Sen'Haillar adepts could sometimes blast an enemy with precise hits across enormous distances, but we were no magicians. We needed a handle, a marker, something to guide our attack. I didn't have anything on our ambushers, so finding them became a matter of chance. And chance was not with me this time around.

"It's over, First Legate. Let's go inside", I said.

We entered the Embassy and were welcome by a lady in white. It wasn't hard to deduce it was Ortense Sen Galahad, dressed so alike her House's liege queen, that one would have thought she was the mirror image of the Lady of Frost.

Up until the time she started to speak. While the Ice Queen was always measured and calm, this Caldeorean rendition was the complete opposite, closer to Fire than to Frost.

"This is all your fault, Mistress Hardun", she said fixing the First Legate with a baleful glare. "This is the consequence of not listening to my advice, of stubbornly trying to placate the locals, of letting pass slight after slight. To what end? Being targeted in plain sight of the planetary authorities. Being shot at in the middle of the street. Haillar adepts died today, Legate. Good people died, and their blood is all on your hands."

"They died doing their duty, Mistress of Frost", I said. "You do them no honour by blaming their death on anyone else other than the very people who planned this cowardly act."

"You!" shrieked the white-clad harridan. "Who are you, by the way?"

"Ellandra Deluan, Legate Assistant, my Lady."

"You, Legate Assistant? You are a spy, nothing but a rogue, a snitch hiding into the shadows. You are here illegally, Miss Deluan. As the highest-ranking Sen'Haillar on this planet, I am to be informed of any arriving adept. You failed to do this, and in doing so you broke the Dominion law. Make no mistake, I wouldn't let this pass. I will report you to the Order Queen, and to the Ice Lady herself, and not even Verdid Sen'Aesir would be able to protect you."

I doubted somehow that the Order Queen, not to mention the Queen of Frost, who didn't have any stake on Caldeor, would get themselves involved in sorting out this procedural issue. My lack of concern must have shown, as Ortens Sen'Galahad continued her tirade.

"This place has devolved into anarchy over the past fifty days. I can hardly wait for the Suzerain Queen to take back her rightful place and set everything in order."

I found the idea of Ortense reporting my transgressions to the Suzerain slightly ridiculous. I knew for a fact that the Chaos Queen had never met the Caldeorean Resident, and that she would never approve bullying in any case, no matter how entitled the bully believed herself to be.

Nevertheless, I reigned in my temper and bowed to the Sen'Galahad, as a junior practitioner to her superior. I had no intention to get caught in the local infighting, any more than I already was.

The Resident adept dropped the issue and waved me off, as not being worthy of her ire. She turned instead back on Delora.

"You and I need to come together and sort out this mess, Legate."

I entered the canteen and got an altogether different reaction compared to my low-key arrival yesterday. By now, everybody seemed to be up to speed that something happened outside, yet no one had all the details.

My arrival was met with hushed whispers and furtive looks, as the few people who already knew me were making their colleagues aware of my presence.

"Ellandra!" exclaimed Sandrial, coming from the back where he was having tea with one of his friends, Prion I believe. "You are a woman of mystery, Miss Ellandra Deluan. Or should I call you Lady Ellandra Sen'Aesir, as befitting your station."

One of the common mistakes people make was assuming that any adept working from the shadows was automatically a Sen'Aesir. Yes indeed, the Spy Mistress was Verdid Sen'Aesir, and indeed a large proportion of her cohorts were people from her house, but by no means all of the shadow agents were adepts of Dream.

Yet, I wasn't here to correct peoples' misconceptions, but to find out who was plotting against the Dominion while putting Caldeor at risk. And if anyone in this building knew something about this.

"Ellandra Deluan works just fine, Sandrial. I'm still your colleague and still Legate Assistant in this embassy, same as yesterday."

"If you say so, my lady, if you say so."

Was that Legate Halora, the ex-military man who forgot to introduce himself yesterday? Gone was his vague air of condescendence, and this time around his face was displaying a genuine smile. Soldiers and adepts often fought side by side, and in fact, most adepts I knew had also been soldiers at one time or another. I wouldn't be surprised if the Legate knew well the two guards who lost their lives today. Active and retired warriors were often close, especially in an isolated place like this.

I joined Sandrial and his friend, who promptly led me to their table.

“If you are still one of us, Ellandra, then you will do us the favour of joining this group and pay for your meal by recounting step by step everything that happened today. This is what junior legates on Caldeor normally do, sharing everything they know with their friends. Without leaving out any detail.”

I wasn't about to feed the full story of my life to the embassy's grapevine, but I could give a brief account of the events today. I could honour the memory of the people who died, the chatty driang pilot who loved to travel and the two Sen'Vollar adepts who valiantly came to our help and paid the gesture with their life. All killed by a coward, in an undeclared war, against an enemy we couldn't see.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

