

On Mount Kan'ji

Late Morning On the Mountain

Eoroal had a difficult time following the ancient firewarrior who's long and vigorous steps meant that he had to run to keep up.

"HIYATE! Will you slow...down...and...what is that...that you're humming anyway?"

"*Boom...trumpah...trumpah...It's a Sacean march? Don't you know The People's Firewarrior March?*"

"Of course I know it! The wife plays all those Sacean marches for the children. Wakes them up in the morning with a march, gets them off to school with a march, and even puts them to bed playing a march. Came to breakfast one morning to see them all standing parade before the breakfast table. The wife's a nutter when it comes to all of that stuff!"

"Well, then hum or sing along with me will you? I'll take the tenor line and you can take the bass, then we all join in for the drum section: *Boom, boom, boom*, alright?"

"Jah vol mein Shas'o!"

With that the two tau men made their way down the trail marching and humming: "*Boom, boom, boom...trumpah...trumpah...brap-ah, brap-ah, brap-ah...boom, boom, boom!*"

But as they came level with Eoroal's cell there was an unexpected encounter. Two of Qan'tel's other students, a mid-ranking water caste woman and a lower ranking earth caste man, met them coming up the trail. The two started to hail Eoroal; but suddenly stopped when they saw their teacher. Eoroal embarrassed stopped his own '*trumpah, trumpah*' and bowed to the other students. The two students with their mouths agape bowed in embarrassment. Acaya Qan'tel for his part did not stop; but rather started to march around in circles while still humming loudly. Every once in a while he would stomp the ground with his hooves to emphasise the '*boom, boom, boom!*'

"Lynu'saznai we were supposed to meet with Acaya this morning. W-w-we couldn't find him, so we came looking for him...*Is he alright?*" asked the water caste woman.

"*Boom, boom, boom...trumpah...trumpah...brap-ah, brap-ah, brap-ah...boom, boom, boom!*" hummed Qan'tel.

Eoroal looked at the students and then back to his teacher who was still marching in circles. Then suddenly Eoroal remembered Li'xiu and Temu'jin and he turned towards his cell. There Temu'jin lay on his back, but was now absolutely naked. Eoroal saw that Li'xiu had somehow wrapped Temu'jin's loin cloth around her left hand, while still lying on top of him. He looked back at the students and saw they were also looking towards the front of his cell.

“T’ahhh they were celebrating the end of the fast...too much...too much to eat and drink, *I think?*”

“And what of Acaya Qan'tel?” asked the earth caste man.

“Xhmm too much sun, *I think?* Perhaps you could check on him tomorrow or...the following morning?”

“Yes Eoroal'saznai. We will call on him the day after tomorrow.” With that the two students bowed again, got up, and hurried back up the trail in the direction of Li'xiu's cell. Giving out a deep sigh of relief Eoroal turned to the still marching Qan'tel.

“You know you're not fooling anyone with that crazy old kroot routine. You're *not* the aged, infirm, and demented old knarloc, that you want everyone to believe you are. Sorry to say you do have all your memory files!”

“*Boom, boom, boom...trumpah...trumpah...Are you sure about that? Brap-ah, brap-ah, brap-ah...Not too sure that I'm not a crazy kroot after all? 'Did you know that among the earth caste women often swap husbands?' Are you still sure I'm not a really a loon, a nutter, and an old knarloc that's lost every bit of his memory?*”

“T’ahhh, a right good loon? Yes that you are Acaya, but just not in the way people think you are!” Qan'tel stopped his ‘pass and review’ and looked at Eoroal.

“Pity, I was hoping for a stellar performance in the twittering loon category.”

“Why are you doing this? Is it really necessary? I mean they're not going to pull you out of retirement, that's for sure. Besides...”

“Besides what?”

“Besides, as sure, ‘*The One Path*’, you didn't try to pretend to Temu'jin, Li'xiu and I? The day after Li'xiu got here, you woke us all up at dawn for ‘*a little morning stroll*’; which turned out to be a twenty-five tor'kan forced march, half of which was up a mountain. And...and...the last half-tor'kan was straight up a vertical cliff. So, why bother with all the ‘*I'm loony old kroot*’ routine?”

“Are you finished?”

“Well, yes I suppose I am.”

Qan'tel looked over at Temu'jin and Li'xiu, but then without speaking grabbed Eoroal and hurried him up the trail. They hadn't gone twenty tor'leks when Temu'jin gives out a loud bowel sound, ‘*BRAAAP*’; and Li'xiu drunkenly shouted, ‘*Temu'jin you nasty dras'la!*’ The two tau men stopped on the trail and looked back, but neither of the drunken students woke up. Qan'tel then motioned for them to continue on up the trail. “No, they won't pull me out of retirement, it's far worse than that. They want to put me on a slice of silicon and shove me inside peoples' heads!”

“Hoi, hoi, hoi! Who is going to put you on a piece of silicon? And why would anyone want to do that?”

Eoroal tried to stop, but his teacher kept him moving.

“Aun'O'Va for one, and the entire Ethereal council for another, and for that matter most of the Fire caste high command. And that's not counting all the Earth caste higher ups, who think...who think they can pull this stunt off,” said Qan'tel looking up and down the trail as if he searching for unwanted guests.

“You have my attention namsai, but couldn't you let go of my arm and stop rushing me? If anyone wanted to listen to you, they could do it in any one of eighty different ways. And why are we running?”

“Yes, yes I know. We could be even heard from space and technically speaking, and right now all of my words and actions are being recorded anyway. Just the same way my vital signs and health data are constantly being monitored and uploaded via a satellite link every few rai'kor. *But I have the drop on those dras'la hooligans!* You know that friend of Temu'jin, the one who use to go by the name Elan'ro–*Skull*. But his real given name was Sabu'ro – *Inventor?*”

“Disabled earth caste kid, who went about on a grav-chair, because he didn't like his prosthetic legs. He's quite the technological *wunderkind* in every field I hear. What's his caste rank name now? Fio'El'Yanoi'kais – *Luminous Expert.*”

“T'oh, that's him! He's jimmie-jammed the whole works better than a Big Mek and a mob of Spanna Boys ever could! Sabu'ro has a dummy data feed that makes it look like I'm about to cross over the cold dark gorge to the other world at any rai'kor. But to keep them from snatching me away to hospital or to hospice care, there is just enough of an improvement in my condition every day. So it looks like I've got good days and bad days; but I always do just little better each day. In other words: *I'm getting better all the time.*”

They had arrived at Li'xiu's cell and Qan'tel finally stopped their quick march. Bowing apologetically to Eoroal, Qan'tel then slid open the door to the cell and politely motioned for him to enter. Li'xiu's cell was cut directly into the rocky hill side, but it didn't have either a porch or a fore. Instead her cell had a wide deep opening created by a huge rock ledge, underneath which was the cell itself. Overall Li'xiu's cell was wider than it was deep and was much more luxurious than either Temu'jin's or Eoroal's cell. To the left was the sleeping area with no widows, but high above the bed was a cleft with glazed skylight. The bed itself was a traditional mattress lying atop a blue straw mat. To the right was a small wooden table and bench with shelves cut into the rocks for storage. Li'xiu seemed to have more boxes and bags than her fellow students.

“T'eh, you can sure tell it's a woman's room can't you?” said Eoroal.

“Why because of the yellow 'Hello Puppy' comforter on the bed?” asked Qan'tel.

“No, it's because it *feels* like a woman's place. I felt it before I even saw the bed.”

“T'oh, that's the residual effect of the female pheromones. Don't you remember anything of your *Tau Health*

and Sexuality courses at the academy?”

“Sorry, I guess that I’m just another one of those ‘*lost romantics*’ then namsai!”

“I wouldn’t go that far. You maybe male, but you’re not a ditz when it comes to all the silly romantic stuff. It’s not like you spend all day watching telenovelas from N'Dras or reading trashy e-book romances like some fellows do? Give yourself some credit there brother! Now where was I?”

“I think you were going tell me what's up with all with all this water caste espionage antics? Along with the thing about ‘putting you on a silicon chip’?”

“Sorry, about that I just didn’t want Temu’jin and Li’xiu to overhear,” answered Qan'tel sitting down at the small bench by the table. He then motioned for Eoroal to do the same, and leaning in close said, “Remember my telling you about Aun’Va having another agenda for sending the three of you here?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Well, there’s this plan-a-hoof to put my brain, or some part of my brain, on an advanced neurochip; and then stick the whole thing into the cybernetically enhanced brains of firewarrior commanders. Sabu'ro says they want to take my memories of tactical manoeuvres and somehow transfer them onto the chip. Sabu'ro calls them engrams, which he says are literally the neurological synapse networks for specific memories.”

“Can they do that? Is it even technically feasible? But even it is, won't that violate your rights as a sentient being? It’s unethical and well it's...it'll violate the Tau'va!”

“T’AHH! When did ever following the Greater Good ever stop Aun’Va? Don’t think he and the rest of them won’t do it; because if they can figure out a way to do it they will,” said Qan'tel shaking a thumb at Eoroal.

“What’s the point of sending us to Mount Kan’ji at all then?”

“Exactly! So, what was the point of your coming to Mount Kan’ji then?”

“The point of *my* coming, or the point of *our* coming to Mount Kan’ji?”

“Yes either one? What’s the point for all three of you? And by the way why were only the three of you the only ones chosen, xhmm? Did you ask to come here, or were you volunteered by higher ups? Temu'jin and Li'xiu didn’t come of their own volition, I can tell you that! And why take an entire tau'cyr out of your careers to sit on top of mountain and do what? Listen to me yammer on about the Tau'va?”

Eoroal blinked twice and looked at his teacher, then out to the desert and then back again to his teacher. “We were volunteered to come here because...they think...you’re...going to die? They didn’t want us to learn about the Tau'va. They’re just afraid they’ll lose all your combat experience...that you’ll pop off and they can’t retrieve it. So we were sent here to learn it straight from the master...”

“In case the engrams on a chip thingy doesn’t work out,” said Qan’tel.

“In case the engrams on a chip thingy doesn’t work out,” said Eoral. He stared at his teacher and then said, “Wait a raik’an, they could get everything they want from your lectures at the academy. Why bother with your actual memories then?”

“Who knows? Maybe, if they can harvest my memories and stick ’em in people’s head; they think they can turn everyone into little ‘Shas’O’Qan’tels’?”

“HEYAAHHH!” Eoroal made a face like he was going to be sick.

“I’d probably kill anyone whose head they stuck me into wouldn’t I? Could you see me inside of your head?”

Acaya Qan’tel jumped to his hooves and pulling Eoroal on to his, then got behind him. He started manipulating Eoroal’s arms a marionette shouting: *‘NO, NO, DON’T HIT HIM LIKE THAT! WHAT CAN’T YOU MAKE YOU WRIST MOVE THAT WAY? T’OH, GO AHEAD AND KICK THAT GREENSKIN DRAS’LA THEN!’* Then pretending to whisper into Eoroal’s ear he said, “Or how would you like me to be inside your head t’eh? *‘Eoroal that was a stupid thing to do!’*” He shifted to the other ear, “*‘Well, I wouldn’t have done it like that?’*” Shifts back to the first ear, *‘What? Didn’t you see that Meganob come up on the right? Better get a move on then!’*” Shifts yet again to the second ear, “*‘T’oh, he just tore your guts out with his power klaw. What are you dying now?’*” Shifts back to the first ear, “*‘Bad luck that! Guess, I’ll just have to wait here till the Big Mek comes along and tears me out of your skull!’*” laughed Qan’tel with a maniacal look on his face.

“HEYAAHH!” again moaned Eoroal.

Qan’tel spun him around and stared at him with a devilish look in his eyes. “Just wait till they put you on chip, and then stick you in one of your kids’ head? *‘Temu’jinal what the hell was that?’* Of course they could put you and your wife both on chips and then stick both of you in your kid’s head. Think of that? I can just hear you say something like, *‘What dumb arse thing to do?’*, but then she’d say, *‘Don’t lizen to yer fadder, he’s a vanker!’* To which you’d reply, *‘Tell mum go to shove off! What does she know? She was a Public Safety Officer that’s never fired a shot in anger?’*”

“That’s an appalling attempt at a Sacean accent by the way. Doesn’t sound a thing like my wife,” said Eoroal looking annoyed.

“Pbft!” said Qan’tel stopping now to begin rummaging around in Li’xiu’s boxes and bags. Then seeming to find what he was looking for, he pulled out a good size crate and snapped open the lid. As he fumbled around in the crate he said, “Now what really scares me is that friend of Temu’jin’s. What’s his name again? Yanoi’kais that’s it! He’s

the one you've got to watch out for. At the moment Aun'Va and the Ethereal council have him all tied up in knots, but if he has his way...*T'ah, I found them!*...We'll all be androids."

"Androids?"

"T'oh yes. The lad has gotten half way to completing a fully functional cybernetic brain! A positronic brain is what he's calling it. And this damn '*brain*' is going to make that neuro engram chip thingy, look like a promethium guzzling Gue'la armoured vehicle, standing next to an seek Aeldari grav tank! That earth caste fellah is pushing us technologically ahead eight hundred tau'cyr! But if he ever gets his way, we'll all be walking around in completely robotic bodies; except that we'll have all the memories and emotions that we had as living beings. That is according to Yanoi'kais of course"

"Just like a Necron?"

"Just like a Necron. Well almost, but with all of our memories and emotions, remember?"

Qan'tel now pulled three brightly coloured chromium boxes out of the crate: a chromium green box, a chromium teal box, and the finally a chromium blue one, and handed them to Eoroal. "Pick one of these as a going away dinner," he said.

"What-are-these? T'oh, you're right. They're gourmet ready-to-eat meals! How did she get them...wait first we drink up Temu'jin's vi'ky'husa, and by we, I mean *you*; and now I, and by that I mean *us*, are now going to eat up Li'xiu's gourmet food?" said Eoroal looking vexed.

"Hoi, hoi, hoi, wait a raik'or! Look at the crate she hasn't touched a single meal in all this time!" Eoroal looked at the three meal boxes, and sure enough they were matched by three empty spots in the otherwise full crate. "Besides I'm not eating anything, I've already had my proenutsup bar today."

Eoroal scrounged around a little more in the crate and said, "Namsai, but these are all her favourite meals? There is Blue tookie fish with yellow mushroom sauce, red kuris, and blue plum desert....And this one is roasted ly'xutka—*wild boar* with wild black kuris and blue garlic garnish, and a baked white strudel desert...T'oh and here is every child's favourite: Nim'ko'nai noodles with segeneka meat and vegetables, with a sweet red bean pastry. These are all Li'xiu's most favo...*Temu'jin!*" Eoroal looked at his teacher. "He sent her all this food. Just the kind of sweet thing a *husband* might do."

"T'ah, so that also solves the mystery of the 'Hello Puppy' comforter," said Qan'tel looking back at the bed. "He's probably sent her that too. I wondered why any firewarrior about to take command of a cadre would have children's bedding," said Qan'tel stopping to scratch his naked butt. "T'eh, but I can see by the up turned corner at the end there, that the underside is grey and black. A much more appropriate colours for an adult, but not if she were

expecting say, a visit from say her *loving husband*?” said Qan'tel smiling. He turned back around and pointed at the gourmet meals, encouraging Eoroal to take one.

“I’ll take the nim'ko'nai noddles with segeneka meat...” replied Eoroal looking back at the table.

“Here take the meal package out of the box and just slap the whole thing on the table. Wait two raik'or and it’ll be just like the advert says: ‘*As hot as if it were right out of the pot.*’TM”

A little while later Eoroal sat munching his sweet red bean pastry, his back cooled by the rock face behind him. Qan'tel sat on the floor with his staff across his lap meditating. “Can’t believe that there was real red kuris wine too with this meal,” said Eoroal showing his teacher the small empty wine bottle.

“See, they were gourmet meals after all. Are you ready to head out now?”

“Think I’ll wait until evening went it cools down. Then I’ll make a night time walk down to the transport station, and wait there till the next transport arrives in the morning.

“No need to wait, I’ll call for an immediate pick up from the air base. They’ll have you out of here in about a dec or two.”

“T’eh, where is there an air base? And you wouldn’t be calling an AX-4 transport on my account?”

“T’oh no, no, no! They’ll come and get you with a TX-2 skimmer. The Air caste base is just on the other side of the mountains. You never heard the aircraft taking off and landing?”

“Sometimes? I never knew if I was hearing things or not. T’oh, wait...how can you call the airbase? We told us there wasn’t any hotspots out here? And if there are, how do you connect with then?” Eoroal looked perturbed as he stood up and grabbed a broom to begin sweeping around the table.

“T’oh there’s a hotspot here alright. I had the earth caste fellas from the air base come out here and set one up. Of course I needed an antenna and modem to make a connection, but one which wouldn’t be easily recognized, and so my walking staff does that beautifully.” Acaya Qan'tel swung his staff about and showed the tip to his former student. Eoroal stopped his sweeping to look at the electronics array embedded inside the top of the staff.

Eoroal returned to sweeping, but with a great deal more vigour and annoyance. “The whole blood-fire time that we’re supposed to be out in the wilderness communing with nature and contemplating the sacred texts of the Tau’va, YOU HAD A LINK-UP! What do you need a netmatrix connection for? Were you instant messaging other masters on other mountain tops? Or do you just need to upload the latest embarrassing holopics of your students on FaceCodexTM? What you just couldn’t wait to read the latest tweeb from Aun’Va? Or d-d-did have you set up your own TweebTM account: #qan'tel@mtkanji?”

“No, but that wouldn’t be a bad idea no though would it? Actually, I am by required Dal'yth Central

Command to have a netmatrix connection, as I still receive mandatory classified briefings. That fact is no one ever really *retires* from the fire caste. And so with that connection I not only receive my briefings; but I also get to keep up with my telenovelas from N'Dras and read the latest trashy romance e-books. *What can I say? I'm romantic kind of guy!*"

Qan'tel scratched his beard and then said, "T'oh, just to let you know you only have about a dec until the TX-2 gets here. Just called them as I need to get you off the mountain top, so as I can get back to those two," said Qan'tel pointing in the direction of Eoroal's former cell.

"A never ending surprise you are Acaya."

"Besides I have get ready to do another performance of 'the doddering old firewarrior' for the pilot. Don't want them to think I'm healthier than my data feed says I am!" Qan'tel got up and began doing a small routine of stretching, as if he were about to run a foot race.

"What is the point of pretending to be infirm and feeble minded? If they're just going to put you on microchip anyway, why bother?" asked Eoroal picking up the remains of his lunch.

"If I do it right, they won't *dare* think of putting me on microchip. Too much dementia and they'll have to refrain from doing it. Well, at least I hope they won't?" said Qan'tel now settling low into the tau yoga stance of *Horse Kicks Rider*. "Beside...*t'ahh, that feels good...*I get a kick out of seeing how terrified everyone is at my performances. Some of them...*xhmm...*think I'm about ready to pop off. Which...*xhmm...*which I will someday of course...you know just pop off.... *xhmm...*When I do go...it'll be...like I'll go to sleep one night...*T'AHHH XHMM...*and won't wake up."

Acaya Qan'tel now changed stances and dropped down into *Doo-daa Bird Takes a Shite*. "T'ohh, forgot to tell you about my 'hover chair', you know...*xhmm...*the one all three of you wanted to see when...you got here. Actually it's...a decommissioned gun drone...*xhmm...*minus the pulse carbines and the A.I. unit. Sabu'ro fixed it up for me... *xhmm...*When I sit on it...I can lean ever so slightly...and it looks like I'm about to fall off! *Xhmm...t'ohh...xhmm...*should see their faces though!"

Qan'tel now got down onto all fours to do *Tiger Regurgitates Maiden*. "Quite...hilarious actually...and if I lean one way and then another...I can make the damn thing oscillate...even spin!" Qan'tel got up from his yoga stance and smiled at Eoroal. "They see me spinning and they go into an absolute panic. But the best part is they don't hear a thing I'm saying. *Ha-ha-ha* and you should hear them whispering under their breaths, '*Hoi, hoi, hoi, he's about to fall off! TEEYAH his chair is spinning now!*'"

Eoroal watched his teacher pretend to spin about and mimic the effects of the oscillating grav chair, and in spite of himself he began laughing.

“Good I finally made you laugh. Didn’t want you leaving here looking so dour.” said Qan'tel laughing himself.

“*Ha-ha-ha...* I would like to know how a tau’la of your age is able to keep so fit and mentally sharp, that you have to pretend to be infirm and suffering dementia?”

“T’ah-ha! That’s brings us to the finale. That was the very last thing I wanted to share with you before you go. Put away the broom, get your things, and let’s go outside and I’ll...t’oh, you’ll see!” chuckled Acaya Qan'tel.

Once outside in front of Li'xiu’s cell, which was nicely shaded from the Dal'yth star, Acaya Qan'tel had Eoroal stand a little ways from the doorway, and then stood next to a large stone to the right. “No turning around until I say so!”

Eoroal did as he was told and stood looking eastwards towards the far mountain range. “I believe I’ll miss seeing those mountains every morning. T’eh, am I supposed to keep quiet?” There was no answer from his teacher, so he kept silent another couple of raik’or. “I’ll just stand here then,” said Eoroal. He stood there for yet a few more raik’or, but then began wondering when the TX-2 was arriving. And if whatever it was he was supposed to see, might accidentally be seen by the pilot. “Acaya Qan'tel may I turn around now? Acaya? Acaya?” But ever the disciplined firewarrior, Eoroal obediently remained facing eastward. Then looking at his feet he noticed the area around him seemed brighter, as if some light source was illuminating the shadow he was standing in. Eoroal looked around still trying to keep from looking backwards, but then out of the corner of his eye he saw his teacher.

Acaya Qan'tel stood there with his eyes closed with his arms outstretched and his palms facing up; but he was standing at almost a full tor'lek off the ground! Qan'tel's entire body shown with a brilliant white light that seemed to radiate from deep within him. Where the various caste colours were dabbed on his body, the colours were now transparent and also glowed brightly. Eoroal could stand only stare dumbfounded at the sight of his teacher. A profound feeling of peace and serenity seemed to surround Qan'tel; while a pungent floral fragrance like that of dessert flowers permeated the air. Eoroal instinctively dropped to his knees and touched his forehead to the ground.

“Please stand up Shas'El Dal'yth Kiv'rai'ka. This is the answer to your query as to why I am so *fit* at my age. This is outcome of following the Tau'va. When one walks in the path of the Tau'va, then he or she is in harmony with all creation. And it is then that the ni—the *life energy* flows through you and sustains you.”

Eoroal looked up to see his teacher settle down on the ground, and then walk over, to lift him up onto his

hooves. Qan'tel still radiated light as he lifted Eoroal up, but no matter how brilliant the light was, it did not hurt Eoroal's eyes. Rather the brilliance radiance seemed to sooth and invigorate him. When Qan'tel touched his arm Eoroal noticed that he too began to glow from within. Amazed Eoroal looked at the light now radiating from his hands and then noticed that his clothes were glowing as well.

“Reach down and pick up a rock El'Kiv'rai'ka,” said his teacher. And Eoroal then bent down and picked up the nearest rock, and to his complete astonishment, it too began to glow with a white light from within.

“When we are in harmony and balance with the universe, we are illuminated and thus we become bearers of the light of the Tau'va. So through us *The Greater Good* illuminates all of creation!” Still holding the shinning rock, Eoroal turned to see the light began to shine forth from everything about him: the cactuses, the boulders, the bushes, the small lizards, the whirling raptors high in the sky. Everything shone with the uncreated light of the Tau'va and Eoroal began to cry.

“The Ol'cea'sin—*Aeldari* and the Gue'la—*Humans* think that all power comes from the Vash'aun'an—*The Between Space, The Warp*. Why this is so I do not know, but both seem to have forgotten about the very dimension we live in. Both have forgotten about the abundant presence of life-energy that is everywhere about us. Everything of this reality and of this world, when it is revealed to us, shines forth with the power of life El'Kiv'rai'ka!”

Qan'tel eyes now shone entirely white with light, and Eoroal could see gold and silver streams of life-energy pulse through the strands of his master's hair, through his body, and to run down through the earth and out into the valley beyond. To Eoroal the light seemed to extend down deep into the very roots of the mountains, and strands of gold and silver pulsing light connecting all matter together. And what had seemed before to be inanimate was in fact alive: the rocks, the rivers, the wind, and the trees. Which in turn were connected to all of the living animals, to his teacher, and to himself by the strands of pulsing gold and silver life energy.

From within this web of light and lie came his teacher's voice: “You see there are those among our leaders, who have lost their way, and not just the Ethereal caste either. They have forgotten the lessons taught to us by the First Ethereals and so their ignorance blinds them. And such blindness has kept them from seeing the beauty that surrounds them. Their blindness keeps them from seeing the light that is meant for *all sentient* beings, not just the Tau. So this is my final gift to you El'Kiv'rai'ka. Hold onto this gift as a reminder that the path of the Tau'va illuminates all! Carry it with you through all the grim dark days that lay ahead.” And with those final words, the light that radiated from both Acaya Qan'tel and Eoroal faded away. Eoroal was stunned into silence; but his teacher touched Eoroal's shoulder and said softly, “This is more than most can take and it is why I choose to show it only to a few. It is the real reason I pretend to be infirm.”

Eoroal stood in silence unable to speak and bowed to his teacher. Qantel then reached out with a hand and pulled Eoroal close so as to touch foreheads with him. Eoroal now reached out and took his teacher's arms in his, holding on to them at the elbows in the traditional sign of respect. Then letting go Acaya Qan'tel smiled and said, "Now let me show you something fun! I want to show you that grav-chair I was telling you about." Eoroal looked up and saw the chair suddenly come flying over the top of Li'xiu's cell and settled down next to them.

"You mean it was close-by all along?" asked Eloroal in a quiet voice. "Should've known you'd do something like that."

"Well, I have to be 'presentable' at all times. Never know when they'll surprise me with a visit from an Ethereal or other high ranking official," said Qan'tel sitting down on the chair. "Actually I always know when they're coming, due to Sabu'ro's efficient surveillance network, but I believe in being always prepared."

"Why it looks a lot like the hover throne of Aun'Va? Didn't you get in trouble for that?" said Eoral with a gentle laugh touching the dual handled control column. To Eoroal the hover did indeed look much like Aun'Va's except that it was of a reddish colour and smaller.

"No trouble at all! Instead I was congratulated on having and I am quoting here, '*An appropriate hover chair for my status as a Sword Saint*'. But just know that I didn't ask for it to look like this, it's Saburo's idea of a joke!" laughed Qan'tel. "Well your transport is almost here. The airbase just signalled for the confirmation of our position and to relay the TX-2's ETA. Good luck El'Kiv'rai'ka. May you carry this name until you become Shas'O'Dal'yth Kais!"

"Acaya Qan'tel, I thank you for the teaching, the lesson, and the gift. I only hope that my fellow students will come to their own understanding on the Tau'va and receive their own *gift*."

"Let us hope so El'Kiv'rai'ka, let us hope so."

The new Shas'El'Kiv'rai'ka looked to the north and saw the shape of the speeding skimmer coming over the ridge. The small vehicle seemed like a fragile insect with its' under slung engines, exposed tandem seating, and gracefully curved slender top. The skimmer's parasol-like roof gave Eoroal the impression of the folded wings of a dragon wing insect. Overall the TX-2 gave off a jaunty air as it settled down in front of the two tau men. The female pathfinder pilot removed her helmet and hailed them, "I take it you are Shas'El'Dal'yth Lynu? Are you ready to go sir?"

"Yes I am ready, but the name is now Shas'El'Dal'yth Kiv'rai'ka."

"Yes sir Shas'El'Dal'yth Kiv'rai'ka. So you received a change of name while you were here, very auspicious!"

At that moment Acaya Qan'tel made a moaning sound. The new El'Kiv'rai'ka looked back and was horrified at the old firewarrior's appearance. The old tau's skin was now an awful, sickly grey colour, with large bluish-black spots all across his arms and legs. Qan'tel's back was so grotesquely bent and twisted, that his entire body leaned far over to one side. He seemed to teeter precariously on his hover chair; but then looking up at his former student, he tugged his beard ever so gently while clicking his teeth plates. Kiv'rai'ka smiled back to his former teacher, as he also tugged his chin and quietly clacked his teeth plates. The old Tau man moved the chair closer and reached up slowly to touch foreheads with Eoroal. Qan'tel held their foreheads together for some time; but then finally let go. Kiv'rai'ka stepped back and bowed deeply to his teacher.

"I'm ready to go shas'la," he said turning back to the pilot

"*TEE-yahh...he...smells...bad!*" said the pilot covering her mouth. Then from behind her hand she asked, "Is he alright? The Acaya seems terribly sick. Should we call for medical transport?"

"No, he's like this all the time. Besides there are other students waiting for him a little ways down the trail," replied El'Kiv'rai'ka softly. He then approached the pilot and motioned for her to resume her seat. She hesitated and started to say something, but he cut her off. "Shas'la believe me he is alright! So please take your seat."

The pilot shot glance at Qan'tel and then wagged her head 'yes'. She climbed into the pilot's seat, while El'Kiv'rai'ka climbed into the observer's seat behind her. "Well, you certainly live up to you name sir, Kiv'rai'ka—*Decisive!*" said the pilot as she handed him a pair of flight goggles and a comlink antenna. "That's a caste rank name I've never heard anyone ever carry before. I wanted to ask how you came to earn it, but I think I know why."

"You still may ask shas'la, but it's a long story." He waited for her to put on her helmet and leaned forward to tap her on the shoulder, as spoke through the intercom, "Comm check, do you read me shas'la?"

"Loud and clear sir."

"What's you name shas'la?"

"Shas'La Wu'ken sir."

"Shas'La Wu'ken so about my new name. Here's the short version—it's a bit of pun actually."

"Pun sir?" said the pilot as the TX-2 lifted off the ground and spun around towards the north. El'Kiv'rai'ka could see the 'infirm and feeble' Acaya Qan'tel weakly wave at him, and then watched as his teacher's hover chair wobbled and bobbed its way down the trail toward his former cell.

"Yes, a bit of a pun. Have you ever heard of a Kiv'rai't'xa—*A Decision Ritual?*"

FINI

APPENDIX I: Translator's Note

ON MOUNT KAN'JI

In wake of our translations of the two most popular tau young adult series: *Two Brothers Walk the Stars*, and *The Academy*. We have decided to branch out in a new direction with the translation from adult tau literature, and so present you dear reader with our translation of the novella: On Mount Kan'ji. This is a fictionalized encounter between Shas'O'Kais and his teacher Shas'O'Qan'tel at the hermitage of Mount Kan'ji on Dal'yth prime. Dal'yth being a battle site of the infamous Damocles Gulf Crusade in 745.M41. And although the piece is set in the Tau Commonwealth, a discerning reader should be able to detect a subtle, but decidedly pro-Enclave bias of the work. However slight the bias is, please note that a great deal of the material is factual, although it is presented here in a highly fictionalized form.

THE TRANSLATION

The translator working between two human languages is oft times faced with insurmountable problems. Often the original language cannot ever be adequately translated. Concepts are often encapsulated in single words; which have no corresponding equivalent in the second language. Just as often the beauty, subtlety, and the nuance of the original language are more often than not, 'lost in translation'. When the original document is of a technical in nature translation is somewhat easier; but if one is attempting to translate a work of fiction, it is sometimes nigh impossible. So to translate a 'xenos language' like Tau into standard Gothic, presents at the very best an almost Herculean task! However we believe the attempt is worth the effort, especially in these trying times; so to do anything to help create peace and understanding between races in our galaxy, is very much worth the effort.

As with our previous translations, this work contains a great deal cultural, historical, anthropological and linguistic information. All of which would be common knowledge to a Tau audience; but would leave a reader from the Imperium feeling utterly lost and confused. We therefore have annotated this translation with footnotes, as well as provided an appendices with a tau glossary, list of tau phrases, as well as a list of the 'Given Names' and 'Caste Rank' names of the major characters.

And like our earlier works, there are often references to Tau fauna like '*fox*' or '*horse*' etcetera. Please beware that we have substituted the names of Tau animals with the names of their closest terran equivalent. Often there is in fact no resemblance at all between the two creatures, except perhaps for a cultural or historical one. However, by doing so we hope to give the reader a sense of the importance that animal has in the original Tau language.

Lastly to those who continually complain that we have not faithfully rendered the Tau language, at least where it concerns this or any other work for that matter; and who say that we have, 'dumbed it down to just make a credit'. To them we say: '*You should probably just go ahead read it in the original Tau language; but if you feel that strongly about it, then by all means go ahead publish your own damn translation!*'

— The Damocles Gulf Translation Collective

APPENDIX II: Tau Words and Phrases

Tau Words and Phrases

An'muk'xux'ten'grii – *'Land of the Eternal Blue Sky'*

Anda or Anda'ta'lissera – *Covenant Brother/Covenant Sister i.e. Battle Brother/Battle Sister*

Bentu'cea'la – *'A well cultured person' i.e. Gentleman or Lady*

Da'erue – *Dark rivalry*

Doean'hui'la – *Steppe hen*

Doean'search'maa – *Steppe hare*

Doean'yow'la – *Short-tailed steppe cat*

-Ike [suffix] – *Sport (dō)*

-Kan [suffix] – *'Mister'*

Kisun'erue – *Blood rivalry*

Kiv'rai'ka – *Decisive*

Kiv'rai't'xa – *Decision Ritual*

Ky'husa – *A strong liquor, much like whiskey, rye or gin.*

-Jun [suffix] – *'Miss' or 'Miz'*

Lhas'nan – *Jade Dagger*

Nim'ko'nai – *Name of a traditional tau green noodle dish*

Namsai – *Teacher*

Nan'ka'tuk'ike – *Combat fighting sport*

Mineka – *Ambition*

Mont'ka – *Killing Blow*

Mon'keged – *Dark name i.e. a Courtship name*

Mon'mal'nemal – *Little black stinging scorpion*

Mon'myr – *War knife*

Mont'nanal – *Small war blade*

Noyea'kirsa – *Hedonist or Slut (Princess Fox or Lady Fox from tau mythology)*

Ol'cea'sin – *'Bright Enlightened People' i.e. Craftworld Eldar*

Ol'erue – *Bright rivalry*

Qazdan – *Dragon*

-Riika [suffix] – *Martial art (i.e. -jitsu)*

R'nan – *Long Sword*

R'nan'riika – *Art of the long sword*

R'myr – *Long Knife*

R'myr'riika – *Art of the long knife*

Sav't'alissera – *A betrothal of marriage*

Saznai – *Mentor/Senior*

Segeneka – *Goat*

Shas'anuk'la – *Firebird, a large tau raptor similar to a terran condor*

T'car – *An alcoholic beverage made from distilled tau wine that is meant to be sipped, i.e. a cognac like liquor*

Tai'lhas – *White Jade* (Infamous tau assassin from the 22nd tau'cyr century)

Tai'qazdan'ta'anan'co'eberiyet'au – *'White Dragon Contemplates the Suffering of the World'* (Famous ethereal saint)

Tekiya – *Jealousy*

Tenxer'suam – *The Sapphire Flame*

Ur'hui'la – *Quick wing* (a bird similar to an ancient terran Road Runner)

Ur'riika – *Art of the quick draw* (sword)

Upt'aun'la – *Mountain monk* i.e. Hermit or Mountain Ethereal

Vi'ky'husa – A type of single-malt ky'husa much prized on Vior'la and in the Enclaves.

Vash'aun'an – *The Between Space* i.e. The Warp

Velu – *Tau rugby*

-Xohnai [suffix] – *Junior/Protégé*

Yekia'ten'grii – *Magenta Sky* i.e. Sunset

Ynege'kir – *Pervert* (Coyote-dog/Jackal-dog from tau folklore)

Yolwas – *Panther*

Yolwas'a'yebegeli – *Panther stride* i.e. To walk with the power and charisma of a tau panther.

Tau Phrases

HeeYAHH: Not a word, but a sound; which carries a sense of disgust or revulsion, or simply 'WTF?'

Hoi, hoi, hoi: The rough equivalent to 'Whoa, whoa, whoa'

Nuni: 'Thank You'

T'ah: 'Ah'

T'eh: 'Uh' or 'Eh'

T'oh: 'Oh!' or 'Ah-ha!'

TEE-ahh: Not a word, but a sound: with the general sense of surprise or amazement, i.e. 'Oh my!'

Xhmm: Not a word, but a sound: something like, 'Hmm' or 'Umm'

Xux'yolwas'h'tekiya: The Blue Panther of Jealousy

Va'mon'qazdan'h'mineka: The Great Black Dragon of Ambition

APPENDIX III: Caste Rank Names and War Philosophies

Caste Rank, Honorific and Given Names

Among the fire caste of the Tau Empire there are many naming traditions. As with all castes the individual firewarrior has a *Given Name*, or a name usually bestowed upon them at one tau'cyr of age. This name will always be the one he or she will be known as to the family and possibly to few closest comrades. *Tem'ujin*, *Li'xiu* and *Eoroal* are examples of such names. An *Honorific Name* is a name earned by a firewarrior, and is awarded in a similar fashion to the Imperial Guard's awards and decorations. These names can be quite numerous, but rarely is an individual firewarrior ever addressed by such a name. Mont'yr and Kais are examples of such names. Lastly there are the *Caste Rank Names*, which are bestowed on a firewarrior when he or she achieves a particular rank level. The changing of the rank name denotes both the change in the firewarrior's status and is meant to highlight some outstanding characteristic, or quality, they may possess.

This new caste name will therefore be the proper name that the individual carries as long as they are of that rank. All other firewarriors regardless of their own rank, will address the firewarrior by this name. Only family and close friends are the exception to this rule; and may call the firewarrior by their Given Name. Please note how Acaya Qan'tel addresses El'Lynu throughout the story. Often he is shown addressing him by his Given Name: Eoroal, rather than by Rank Name. This informality is an indicator of the closeness of the student to his teacher. However, reflecting their respective positions as teacher and student, El'Lynu never addresses his teacher by his Given Name, or even his Caste Rank Name – O'Qan'tel; but rather only as *Namsai–Teacher*, *Acaya–Master* or even *Acaya Qan'tel – Master Puretide*.

Shas'O'Vior'la Shova: *Temu'jin*

Shas'Saal'Temu'jin – *Forged of Iron* (Given Name)

Shas'La'Tsua'm – Middle or '*Always-Where-He's-Needed*'

Shas'Ui'Alag'kial – *Little Killer* or *Young Executioner*

Shas'Vre'Vi'kinot – *Red Wolf* or '*Successful*'

Shas'El'Ran'oran – *Heart of High Courage* or '*Braveheart*'

Shas'O'Shovah – *Far-sighted, Prophetic* or '*Farsight*'

Shas'O'T'au Shaserra: *Li'Xiu*

Shas'Saal Li'xiu – *Wild Pine Tree* (Given Name)

Shas'La Shi'ur – *Quick Victory*

Shas'Ui Da'ka – *Dark Strike* or *The Unseen Blow* i.e. '*Assassin's Strike*'

Shas'Vre Káu'yr'ejii – *Hunt Mother* lit. '*Prey Seeker Mother*'

Shas'El Lhas'xan – *Jade Dagger*

Shas'O Shaserra – *Shadowsun* or '*Mirage*'

Shas'O'Dal'yth Kais: Eoroal

Shas'Saal'Eoroal – *Ghillie or Little Squire* (Given Name)

Shas'La'Kais'ka – *Skilful Strike*

Shas'Ui'Forgol – *War Mask*

Shas'Vre'Monat'shi – *Individual Acting for Victory or 'Victory Through Individual Action'*

Shas'El'Lynu – *Steadfastness* (1)

Shas'El'Kiv'rai'ka – *Decisive* (2)

Shas'O'Kais – *Skillful*

War Philosophies or Personal Schools of War:

Ret'ka'h'mont'ka – *School of Killing Blow* (Shas'O'Shova)

Ret'ka'h'kauyon – *School of Patient Hunter School* (Shas'O'Shaserra)

Ret'ka'h'monat'shi – *School of Victory Through Individual Action School* (Shas'O'Kais)

Ret'ka'h'va'or'es'ka – *School of Great Strength, Great Strike School* (Shas'O'Or'es'ka)

On Mount'Kanji**Part III: Late morning on the Mountain**

Riodan O'Duffy 2014, 2015, 2020[©]

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