

Author's Note- Thanks for taking the time to read this. The whole series is coming along nicely and we're starting to move into some of the major events of my universe. Things will begin to move even quicker. I always appreciate feedback and can be reached at [Cobalt-Blue](#).

If you are interested in reading more of my tales including "young Master Carpenter"; or other tales set in this universe, you can find them at: [Atlantis Unleashed](#).

Characters in this story:

[Runeclaw](#)

[Sun Dancer](#)

Cattin' Around Chapter 11

I NEED A HERO!

I spent the year in and out of some of the worst hellholes in the world. I watched the fall of the Soviet Union, and in a my own way had some involvement in helping it along. I had a couple encounters with the Soviet operative, Russian Winter. He and I slugged it out twice, once in the Urals and then again in Siberia. You haven't lived until you've fought an ice based elementalist in their own element.

I watched as more and more transhumans came to light. Sun Dancer and the first Dreamweaver went from calling themselves Miami Nice to becoming the first official Paraforce Team- that is a team recognized by the government with real law enforcement powers. Although the team was originally based out of Miami, after a while it got moved to Washington DC. But when I knew him, he was working out of Miami.

It was about a year after my encounter with Gates Murphy in Birmingham. Metro Dade Police Department asked for help from the Department of Nocturnal Affairs. They had a serial murderer/rapist in the Miami area, and there was something strange about it. I didn't understand exactly how strange until I got to the police department. The DNA called my Commanding Officer and once again, I was put on TDY to the DNA, and they promptly sent me to Miami.

The thing about being on assignment to the DNA, meant that I had to wear civilian clothing. So even though my bearing was still military, when I walked into the Metro Dade Police Department I was wearing slacks a shirt, and a tie. I don't care how fashionable it is, a jacket in South Florida in the middle of the summer is a bad idea.

My sports jacket was lying the back seat of my rented car- no I didn't bring the Lamborghini with me.

As I entered the main area I showed my DNA and my military ID and spoke to the man at the desk, "My name is Robin Greenbough, I'm looking for Detective Enkoff."

The man looked at the ID and said, "He's in a meeting with a VIP the Feds sent over."

"I raised and eyebrow and asked, "Can you tell me which floor?"

"Third floor," he said. "Take that elevator over there," he indicated the far wall.

"Thank you," I said and headed up to see the detective.

Actually I took the stairs. It was only two flights up and by the time I waited for an elevator, I could already be there. As I entered the outer office, I showed my ID to the sergeant at the desk. She smiled up at me with set of big chocolate brown eyes and said, "Third door on the right, Agent Greenbough."

I smiled back at her and said, "Thanks."

I knew several people's eyes were following me as I went to the indicated door and knocked. I heard someone say, "Come in." Entering I was just a little bit surprised too see a man standing there in a garish red, white and black costume. I immediately recognized Sun Dancer. I smiled, noticing how well he filled out that uniform.

I produced my ID and said, "I'm Agent Greenbough with the DNA."

A stocky blond man held out his hand and I gave him the wallet. Sun Dancer nodded and gave me a smile. "This says you're also active duty on TDY from the Navy?"

I nodded and said, "Yeah. I'm primarily a naval officer, but I act as a liaison with the DNA."

"Strange accommodation," the man said. "Never heard of that before."

"Nocturnal military officers usually serve dual roles," I told him. "It's been a standing tradition since the DNA was formed back in the fifties."

He stood, gave me my ID back and offered me his hand. "I'm Detective Enkoff and this is Sun Dancer from Paraforce 1. At this point, I'll take all the help I can get."

Indicating two chairs, he said, "Gentlemen, please sit down."

I took my chair and noticed that the hero did the same. "The briefing I got from the DNA was very sketchy. What exactly is going on?"

Detective Enkoff frowned and said, "In the past year, we've confirmed fifteen attacks on women in the Miami Dade County area. Three rapes, and twelve rape murders."

"Sounds like serial attacker," I said. "But why bring in the DNA," I indicated Sun Dancer with my head and added, "or Paraforce 1?"

Enkoff shook his head sadly and said, "Because the three survivors of the rapes have all become weretigers."

"Have they identified their rapist as an ailurantrope?" I asked.

"A what?" Enkoff asked.

"A werecat," I said.

He shook his head. "No, they describe him as a Hispanic man in his mid thirties. He's evidently rather good looking and extremely strong."

I frowned, "Have you done the blood work on the women to find out if they carried the shifter gene before the attack?"

He shook his head, "No, why should we?" he asked.

"Because it's unlikely that if your attacker is Hispanic that he's a weretiger, or if he's a weretiger, that he's Hispanic."

"I don't understand," Sun Dancer said.

"Ailuranthropy doesn't work quite the same way as lycanthropy," I told him. "If a person is infected with it, and doesn't carry the gene, then they are likely to become the same kind of werecat as their attacker. However if they already have the gene somewhere in the blood line, it doesn't matter if their attacker was a weretiger, a

werecougar, or even a werehousecat, they'll become the type of cat that is in their family line."

"Werehousecat?" Enkoff asked.

I smiled and said, "There are a few, and they're vicious as hell."

"All our reports indicate a man with dark features, black hair, and black eyes," Enkoff said.

"And in Miami, that would suggest a man of Hispanic descent. But if he were Hispanic and his victims did not carry the gene already, then they would probably turn into werejaguars, wereleopards, or maybe werecougars. Weretigers are extremely rare and tend to be people of European, Indian, or in a few rare cases Middle Eastern descent, but those usually trace their ancestry back to India in some way. I'm not saying that there aren't any Hispanics that are weretigers, but they would a really rare situation. Odds are, your victims are confusing someone of Middle Eastern or Indian descent with a Hispanic," I told them.

"How is it you know so much about shifters?" Enkoff asked.

"Because I'm a shifter," I told him. "A tiger."

He sat back and raised an eyebrow. "Can you account for your whereabouts over the last year?" I could tell that he was half way joking.

"Outside of a brief spell around October of last year when I was on leave in Alabama, I've been out of the country. My CO can vouch for that," I told him in dead earnest.

"Why are weretigers so rare?" Sun Dancer asked.

I smiled and said, "Because few people survive the bite. Being bitten by a wolf is one thing. Being bitten by a tiger is another. Most of us are born the way we are. Add into that the fact that ailuranthropy is nowhere nearly as virulent as lycanthropy and you have few cases of it."

He nodded and said, "I suspected as much. Exactly how can it be spread?"

"It requires an exchange of bodily fluids into an open wound," I said.

"So you can catch it through swapping spit?" Enkoff asked.

I shook my head and said, "No, not unless the ailuranthrope is in their tiger or battleform and the infectee has an open sore in their mouth. Our saliva carries antibodies in our human form. However, it can be spread through contact through semen or blood," I told him, trying not to think too much about what I did to Alec.

"So rape would be a way of infecting someone," Enkoff said.

I nodded and replied, "Yeah. If there's tissue tearing and then semen contact, rape could infect someone."

"Oh great, AIDS, and now this," Enkoff said.

I nodded. There was whole range of possible reactions to what he said. Rape in itself was bad enough. But then to end up as a shifter because of it was just rubbing salt into an open wound. Alec had been happy about becoming a weretiger, but then again what we'd done hadn't been a violation, hadn't been rape.

"Is there anything we can do to help the women?" Sun Dancer asked.

"I can put you in touch with some people in New Orleans who should be able to send some help. I've also got a friend in London who's very experienced with helping people deal with their first changes," I told him.

Enkoff shook his head, "There won't be any of that. All three women had to put down. They became a danger to themselves and the people around them."

"Don't you think that was a little drastic?" I asked.

"Not when they started coming at their families and friends at four hundred pounds of weretiger," he said. "The first girl killed her sister before anyone knew what was happening. By the time the third rolled around, we had officers on standby with silver ammunition." He stopped and leaned forward as if making a point. "Every officer on this case is carrying silver ammo now."

"And you just started shooting when she changed?" I asked. "Did anyone stopped to think that maybe they were confused? Maybe lock them in a room where they couldn't get out and let them pace all night?" I asked in shock.

"After the first girl killed her sister, we didn't want to take any chances. They were out of control," he said.

"Of course they were out of control. They had no idea what was happening to them, they were hurt and they were angry," I said harshly. "This creep brutalized and victimized them, and then you guys turn around and victimize them a second time."

Enkoff shook his head, "We couldn't take a chance on them hurting anyone else."

"Of course not," I said standing. Looking over at Sun Dancer, I said, "It looks like you've called in the heavy guns. I probably won't be needed. If you need anything else, call me. I'm staying at the Hyatt on the beach, room 314."

"Sit down Agent Greenbough, nobody here is going to start shooting at you, just because you're a shifter," Sun Dancer said.

"Is that why you think I'm leaving?" I asked.

"I think under the circumstances I would," he said.

I chuckled and said, "Let me see one of those silver rounds, Detective."

He looked at me dubiously, opened his drawer and handed me one of the 9 millimeter rounds. I held it up into the light and looked at it closely. Then taking it in my hand, I pried it out of the casing with my fingers. The look on the detective's face was priceless. I put my hand on his desk, the round on top of my hand, slipped my shoe off and slammed it down on top of the round with enough force to rattle the frosted glass in the door. I lifted the shoe and handed the round back to him. "Silver doesn't affect me. I'm leaving because you obviously don't need me. You're simply going to shoot people full of silver and hope you get the right person. It doesn't matter how many innocents you kill."

"That's enough Agent Greenbough!" Enkoff said.

"You're right, it is, Detective." I put the piece of silver back on his desk and slipped my loafer back on. Send me the bill for the desk."

I turned to leave and Sun Dancer said, "Wait."

I stopped and didn't turn around. "What?"

"What should we do if there's another survivor?"

"Shoot her. You might as well do it while she's still weak, confused, and hurting. You're going to do it anyway on the next new moon. Why waste the money on nursing her back to health?"

I opened the door and left. There was just so much absolute stupidity I was willing to take. I got back into my car and headed toward my hotel room. When I got there,

I gave General Presley a call and told him exactly what was going on. This was not going to be a safe place for any shifter for a long time, not with that kind of mentality being pushed by the police department.

After listening to my report he said, "Stay there for now, Trey. I'm going to give a friend of mine over at the DSI a call and see what we can get worked out. I can't believe the Miami PD is actually shooting rape victims."

I shrugged and said, "Will do. I'll see what I can dig up on this weretiger of theirs. If nothing else, maybe I can take him down. He's giving the rest of us a bad name."

"Not bring him in?" he asked.

"He's crossed the line, General. Actually he crossed it a long time ago. He's not going to be the kind you can bring in. When we tangle, it's going to be one hell of a fight, and he's going to lose."

"Do what you have to, Trey," he told me.

"Yes, sir," I said and hung up.

I smelled him long before he spoke. "You're rather confident of yourself, aren't you Agent Greenbough?" Sun Dancer asked from my balcony. I watched as the lock on the glass door turned itself, and then he slid it to the side and stepped in.

I didn't bother with my gun. I'd read this man's file. He'd been active in the Miami area for quite a while. I knew he could block most small arms fire with either his own force field or that psi-sword he carried. He was the closest thing there was to a Jedi Knight in the real world. Except he didn't spout all that pacifist dark emotions garbage.

"Is there something I can do for you, Sun Dancer?" I asked.

He nodded and said, "I understand why you walked out. If I'd had the choice I would have too."

"You always have a choice," I told him.

"Actually, I don't. I was ordered to cooperate with Enkoff to the best of my abilities. I'd already read him the riot act about killing the victims," he said.

I watched him very careful, playing close attention to his body language and his eyes. Either he was telling the truth, or he was one hell of a liar. Then again, rumor had it that he was raised off planet, somewhere called Merria, and if that was the case, his body language would be all screwed up. I shrugged, "What would you have me do?

He's not going to listen. He's just going to go behind the rapist and clean up the mess."

"I'd have you help me track down the murderer and stop him before he kills again," he said.

"I'm already working on that." I told him.

"I know. I overheard. General Presley's a good man," he said.

"You know him?" I asked.

Sun Dancer nodded his head. "When my wife was killed by Red October, he helped me make sure he got booted from the Soviet stables."

I nodded. There was an unspoken rule among the major players in the espionage world. You can go after an agent all you want. Hunt him down, capture him or her, torture them, or turn them into shark bait. But you leave the family alone. It was the only way to ensure that the wars didn't get out of hand. This was the one inviolate

rule, and Red October had crossed that line. He was now simply a free-lance mercenary and no reputable intelligence organization would touch him. "I see," I said. "Tell me, what idiot approved of Enkoff's practice of shooting the rape victims?"

"It's not quite that cold blooded. After the first one, he just made sure there were officers on the scene during the full moon."

"Idiot," I said.

"What are you not telling me?" Sun Dancer asked.

"Full moon is for werewolves. With the exception of one very rare breed of werecats, all others shape shift on the new moon."

"But they shifted on the full moon," Sun Dancer protested.

I motioned for him to take one of the large easy chairs in the room and I took the other one. "Most of us can shift any time we damn well please. For those who are bitten, the shifting is somewhat out of control at first and happens during various states of excitement, fear, or just plain worry. If he put an armed officer with the women during the full moon expecting them to shift, they probably worried themselves into shifting."

"How do you know that women weren't that rare breed?" he asked.

I looked at him and said, "Because we're born, not bitten, and because if they had been the silver bullets would have just made them angry," I said.

"That's why you're immune to silver?" he asked.

I nodded. Werecats aren't as vulnerable to it as werewolves and other shifters anyway. It's one of the perks that offsets the fact that we aren't as virulent as the wolves are. Which is a good thing because it's something that helped keep a couple of friends of mine alive on more than one occasion," I told him.

"So what are you vulnerable to?" he asked.

I shook my head and said, "I'm not saying." I leveled my gaze at him and said, "And the only way you're going to pick it out of my mind is if you knock down my shields, which I wouldn't consider if I were you. I know what it feels like and I promise you that it would be unpleasant."

"How is it that you have such strong mental shields?" he asked.

"My mother is a powerful telepath, and so is a very special young lady," I told him.

"Now why is it that you came looking for me?"

He smiled and said, "Because a mutual friend of ours said that you could be trusted. He said that I shouldn't let you near my girlfriend, or boyfriend, but that you can be trusted."

"I have a rule, Sun Dancer, one I developed through the school of hard knocks. I don't mess with what belongs to another."

He chuckled and said, "That's okay. I don't have a girlfriend or a boyfriend. Just a son, a grandfather, a baby sitter, and a space squirrel."

"Space squirrel?" I asked.

"Long story. I needed a guardian for my son and Tavi volunteered," he said. "He's a sciurunoid."

I raised my eyebrow, and wondered what the heck- people kept accusing me of being a neko. I counted myself lucky that I was not of Ratatosk's kin. "I'm sure he sounds a loud alarm in danger."

Sun Dancer grinned at me and said, "No, he usually kills the danger and then sounds the alarm. He's a bit rabid about my son."

I laughed and said, "I can understand that. I have a baby brother who's just now out of diapers. Most of the family is very protective of him." I didn't tell him that Wynn was usually all the way out of them. The last time I had spoken to Mom, she'd complained that he'd figured out that he could get out his diapers by turning into his housecat form and then bounding away to turn back to his natural form. He'd also taken to sharpening his claws on the drapes of their home Sweden.

He nodded and said, "Does this mean we can call a truce and work together?"

"Does this mean that Enkoff isn't going to be shooting at me?" I asked.

"I think I can arrange that," he said with a smile. "Director Kirk is not happy with the way Enkoff is handling this whole mess. That's why he ordered me to help with the investigation."

I nodded and said, "Good. Now where can we begin?"

"How about dinner at my home tonight?" he said. "We can discuss case and I can promise you a decent home-cooked meal."

I raised an eyebrow and asked, "Aren't you afraid I'll spill the beans about your secret ID?"

He shook his head, "Night Angel said you'd been in the old Paraforce HQ back in Birmingham. If he trusts you with that, I think you'll be safe with my identity. Besides, I work best when I've got my family to bounce ideas off. But I will warn you my family is a little crazy," he said with a smile. Then he offered me his hand, "My name is Jeff Anderson."

That evening I found myself outside a large neo-classical style home between Coral Gables and Kendall. When I knocked on the door, a cute little teenage girl opened it. She had long blonde hair and deep blue eyes that just screamed, "trust me". "Hi, I'm Trey Greenbough, is this the Anderson residence?" I asked.

She smiled and said, "Yeah, this is the right place. Jeff said you'd be by about this time. Come on in." She opened the door to let me into air conditioned foyer. As she closed the door, she said, "I'm Leighanne Anderson, Jeff's baby sitter."

"Are you related?" I asked.

She stopped, smiled and shrugged, "Eh, maybe."

I raised an eyebrow at her lack of a definitive answer and wondered what was going on. "Uh, Okay," I said. "Is Jeff here?"

She nodded and said, "He's in the study. You're here about the murders aren't you." I felt something rush against my shields. It was rather powerful, but somewhat clumsy attempt at them.

I looked at her and waved my finger, "Uh huh."

She blushed and smiled. "Sorry."

"It's okay. Just be careful. There *are* people out there who know what a psychic invasion is, and won't give you such a gentle warning," I told her.

"Sorry about that, " an older gentleman said from the main living area. "I've been trying to teach her to be more subtle. She has a great deal of power, but she hasn't quite yet developed a light touch."

I smiled and said, "We all have to learn somehow. I am Trey Greenbough."

"Jeff is expecting you. He's in the study," the older Gentleman said. "I'm Kendor, his grandfather." Looking over at Leighanne he said, "Why don't you go and tell him dinner's ready."

The girl nodded and said, "Okay."

Ten minutes later we were all sitting down to a nice roast and potatoes dinner. I was somewhat surprised at the fact that the babysitter was joining us, but said nothing. Like I said, I got the feeling that there was more going on there than met the eye.

Many of us in the transhuman community have our secrets, and that was even more so at that time, especially when it came to who was related to whom and who was sleeping with who. Although, to set the record straight, Jeff Anderson never slept with Leighanne, but his relationship with her eventually cost him his status as a Gem Corpsman and his powers.

As we all sat down to eat, I met Jeff's son who was at the time about five years old. Now, he's a grown man and a rather successful administrator at Carlton Junior High.

Then he was simply a precocious little boy with big blue eyes and sweet smile. He also had a taste for roasted carrots, as I discovered him swiping them from my plate.

I waited for Jeff to bring up the case, being unsure what he considered to be appropriate dinner conversation. Instead we simply talked of my arrival in Miami, my experiences in the Navy, what I could talk about that is, and my own family. He did seem to pay close attention to my left hand and after a while I realized I was being sized up for more than just a partner on the case. Before this mission was over, I got the feeling that I was going to be having the same talk with him that I did with Alec, and Gates.

After dinner, we retired to his study and began going over the details of the case. The police department had done a very good job of keeping the extent of the attacks out of the papers, and only just now was the press starting to pick up on the idea that something might be going wrong. Still the pattern was frightening. All the women were attractive, and either business professionals on the fast track to success, or were in college with professional career track majors.

"I really can't find anything they all have in common, " Jeff said tossing the photos onto the coffee table and throwing himself backwards in frustration into his wingback chair.

I looked down at the photos. The women were black, and white, Hispanic, and Asian. They were Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Pagan, and even one Rastafarian. Nothing bound them all together. "I don't see a connection either," I told him as Leighanne entered the room.

She looked down at the pictures and then back up at Jeff before saying, "Kendor is taking me home."

Jeff smiled, pulled out his wallet and handed her two twenties. "Thanks for watching Kendall for me."

"My pleasure," she said putting the money into her jeans pocket. Then looking down at the photos, she said. "Are these the victims?"

"Yeah," Jeff said. "We can't find anything they all have in common."

"Are you blind?" she asked. "No, wait," she looked at him. "You have an excuse. You don't have all the cultural exposure to connect it." She turned to me and said, "But you were raised here. You should see it."

I shook my head and said, "I don't see anything but a bunch of attractive girls."

She smiled, "That's part of it. Don't you get it?" She picked up the photos and laid them out on the table. "They're all the All-American Girl type. Fresh-faced, attractive, smart, girl next door types. You're killer isn't attacking women, he's attacking an idea."

"I don't see it," Jeff said.

"Wait a minute," I told him leaning forward. "I think she's onto something here."

Looking at the photos I realized that she was right. These girls were attractive, but they weren't beauty queens. They were smart, but they weren't nerds. They all just seemed to be what you would think of when you thought of the All American Girl." I looked back up at her and said, "You're good at this kind of thing."

She smiled at the compliment and said, "I'm studying psychology on my own. Trying to figure out what makes people's minds tick."

I laughed and said, "Go into criminal profiling. It's a pretty new science and by the time you're ready you'll be able to go a long way."

Before she could answer, Kendor came to the door and said, "I'm ready Leighanne." He turned to Jeff and said, "Kendall's down for the night."

"Thanks, Kendor," he said.

After they left I looked at Jeff and asked, "If you don't mind me asking, what's their story?"

He smiled and said, "When I first came to Earth, Kendor was my mentor. He taught me everything I know about fighting, about the Corps and about using my powers."

"Exactly what is the Corps?" I asked.

He shrugged and said, "Meirria was once part of the Atlantean Empire back about three hundred thousand years ago. When the Empire disintegrated during a civil war, the Merrians picked up their whole city and moved it out into deep space- into the Sagittarius Arm of the Galaxy. They created the Gem Corps as a way of reproducing the old Mideanite Imperial Guard that protected the Emperor and High Questor. We became the keepers of the peace- sort of a galactic version of the Texas Rangers. They chose people from each planet that was to be protected, amplified our natural psionic powers with the psi-gems and tied us into the Gemsong."

"So you were born on Earth?" I asked.

He nodded and said, "Yeah. I don't know who my parents were. Kendor says they died when I was a baby. He took me to Meirria, trained me to fight, trained me to use my powers and then brought me back here. I've been here since just a few months after Night Angel started his career."

I laughed and said, "Seems like we always start young. Why are you the first Gem Corpsman on Earth? I mean if the Merrians came from Earth it would seem like they'd eventually come back."

He shook his head and said, "No. Atlantis and Earth are nearly mythical to them. Earth has been off-limits to any alien species, and Meirrians enforce that rather ferociously. It has something to do with their religion, and I don't understand it at all. They sent me when it became clear that Earth was starting to venture off planet. Eventually we're going to get to space, and the Meirrians feel it would be a good idea if there was at least someone that could introduce Terrans to the idea of off-world civilizations. So they sent me."

"And you met and fell in love with Kendall's mother?" I asked. "Don't take this wrong but you seem to be rather young to be the father of a seven year old."

He blushed and said, "I am. Let's just say that when Mary and I started dating, I didn't understand as much about human birth control as I thought I did. She got pregnant, and I did the right thing." He sighed. "And I don't regret it. The only thing I regret is that I couldn't save her. But that was a long time ago."

I nodded. I could tell that his wife was close to his heart, but at the same time, I sense that he really had finished his grieving. Looking back down at the photos I said, "So what we are looking for is someone who hates the idea of the All-American Girl?"

"It's a theory," he said. "It happens to fit the facts. That would suggest that the killer got to know his victims before the attack, he at least stalked them."

"I can guarantee you that he stalked them," I said.

"How?" he asked.

"He's a cat, and most probably a tiger. Tigers are ambush predators. We stalk and pounce when the prey least expect us," I said.

"And have you stalked and pounced prey before?" he asked in a tone that made me wonder if he was talking about a real fight or other things.

I raised an eyebrow and said, "I've had my fair share of combat and conquests."

"What do you do with prey that fights back?" he asked.

"Depends on my intentions," I told him. "Are we talking about me or the killer?"

He smiled at me and actually blushed rather handsomely. "Right now we're talking about the killer. If you're interested in other conquests, we can talk later about fighting back."

I chuckled and nodded. "As for what do I do when the prey fights back, I usually try to move in for an overpowering attack, and reduce their ability to fight back. That usually means a killing blow. But our killer doesn't want to kill his victims, at least not at first. He wants them to know what he's doing to them, he wants them to suffer. He's overpowering them, but he's leaving them alive."

Jeff nodded and asked, "So what would you do to immobilize them?"

I shook my head and said, "What I have access to..., wait a minute!"

He gave me a strange look and said, "What?"

I've been thinking about this all wrong. His instincts are that of a tiger, but he's using his human intellect, skills that he has in his human form. He rapes them as a human, not in his battle form or his tiger form."

"So?" Jeff asked.

"He's using other gifts, and unless I miss my guess, he's using magic," I told him.

"How do you know it's magic? Why not a transhuman power or psionics?" he asked.

"Of all the shifter peoples, werecats are the most likely to be mages. We're also the most likely to be unstable, and mages doubly so," I said.

"Unstable?" he asked.

I shook my head. How could I describe so many centuries of persecution at the hands of the Directive that the werecats had faced? How did I describe the history of how most modern werecats came into being? I sighed and said, "Somewhat mad.

Some of it, most of it is harmless. Little quirks that grow with the years. Sometimes it can turn violent though and when that happens it can really nasty. Part of it is a need to seek their own company, the need to pride, even the tigers. But at the same time, they're solitary creatures. The conflict that creates can drive a cat insane."

He gave me a long look and asked, "And you?"

I shook my head, "Not my situation. I'm a magecat. My origins are completely different. There are supposedly only nine of us, each of our lines created by Freyja herself and given our commission. We don't fit normal werecat psychology. We have two driving forces in our minds. The first, the most important is her commission: to stand between humanity and those that would the free enchain."

"And the second?" he asked.

I smiled at him and said, "That one is a little more personal. Some people say that she put just a little too much of herself in us. At best we can be described as sensual, at worse down right slutty."

"And you?" he asked.

"Like I said, I've had my share of conquests," I told him. It was time I stopped beating around the bush with him. I stopped and gave him a long and appraising look up and down his body. He was a very handsome young man. In the vernacular, he'd be called a twink: young, very well built, and very handsome in a boyish way. His neatly coiffed blond hair was parted on the side, and his skin glowed with a healthy tan that wasn't overly indulgent. I locked eyes with him and let him know I was interested.

He nodded and smiled. Forcing his eyes away from me, he swallowed hard and then turned back to the photos. "What can we do to counter his magic?"

I shook my head and sat back in my own chair saying, "I honestly don't know. It all depends on what style of magic he's doing?"

"Style?"

"Just like the martial arts, the mystical arts have different styles as well. Western magic is one path, Nordic magic, which is what I use is another. Eastern magic gets really weird at times too, but I think that's my own prejudices speaking. If he's middle eastern, then he's not a very devout Muslim, as magic is forbidden to them. If he's Indian, then that's a different story. My own traditions have much of their roots in the Indians," I told him. "But to be honest, this doesn't sound like a Hindu."

"Just what I need, to go up against a foe with powers I don't understand and don't know how to counter."

"Stick your sword into him," I said.

"I beg your pardon," he asked.

"Your psi sword. It generates heat, right?"

"Yeah, it's an energy field that's one part high energy laser and one part kinetic force, like a particle cannon. Why?"

"There's one force that hurts all thropi, even me, and that's fire. If your sword is one half laser then that means it hurts like fire does," I told him. "And a kinetic force capable of knocking him on his ass won't hurt either."

"Thought you weren't going to tell me what you're vulnerable to," he said with a smile.

"I said it hurts me, I didn't say it would stop me, and it damn sure won't bypass my defenses, like silver does a werewolf," I told him.

Just then the door opened and in walked an anthropomorphic squirrel, complete with bushy tail. He was about eighteen inches high and had rich rust red fur. He looked over at me, and his already large green eyes grew even larger. "I'm sorry. I didn't know you had company," he said in a quick high pitched voice that reminded me of a popular chipmunk singer.

"Tavi, this is Trey Greenbough," Jeff said. "Trey, this is Tavi, Kendall's guardian."

I nodded to the little fellow as he continued to size me up and down. I wasn't sure what his final decision was, but he turned back to Jeff and said, "Kendall's awake and asking for you. He had a nighthpony."

"Nightmare," Jeff said.

"Ridiculous term," Tavi said dismissing the comment. "He had a bad dream and is asking for you."

Jeff nodded, looked at me and said, "If you'll excuse me. I'll be back in a bit."

"Sure," I told him as he headed out the door. I sat there trying not to stare at the small being who was pacing around the room.

He looked over at me and said, "You must be Runeclaw."

I nodded and wondered how he knew- I hadn't yet given my codename the DNA and the Navy used for me when I was in the field. "Yeah," I said.

"Don't look so surprised, Runeclaw. "I've been following your activities for the past five years now. There aren't many mammalian intelligent species in the galaxy, and here on Earth you seem to have a plethora of them," he said. "Right now, you're the first anthro since Tigress."

"Really?" I asked.

He nodded and went to the table next to the fireplace and took something out of a small wooden box and popped it into his mouth. "Actually this whole arm of the galaxy is pretty much devoid of intelligent life. Earth is the only inhabited planet in the local bubble. After the Atlanteans fell, most of the colonies fell to killing each other. It was finally decided just leave the whole bubble to Earth when you guys finally make it out of the system. The Meirrians enforce that dictum over almost any other laws. For some reason they are scared to death of anyone taking this planet for their own."

"What do you mean few mammalian intelligent species?" I asked.

"Outside of this arm of the galaxy most intelligent life is reptilian," he said.

"Interesting," I said. "And Earth has mammalian species, why?"

He smiled at me and said, "Because the Sslelkians wiped themselves and the Shan out in their civil war that devastated most life on the planet. Mammals had a chance to rise in their place."

"Who are the Sslelkians and the Shan?" I asked.

"The first two intelligent species on the planet," he said. "The Sslelkians were an intelligent species of large deinonychus type theropods. They had a highly developed early space-flight civilization. They were just on the verge of interstellar drive when two of their governments went to war and some idiot used a mass driver on the planet as an ultimate doomsday weapon. They wiped out the peaceful Shan in the process."

"Shan?" I asked.

"They were an aquatic humanoid species that lived in the oceans, usually as far away from the Sslelkians as they could get," he said.

"That still doesn't explain why mammals are so rare," I said.

"On most planets, we don't get an opportunity to develop much beyond the size of a house cat. Most reptilian species reach space flight capability and stop evolving. That means that they can reshape their environment to fit themselves, and that prevents other species from developing intelligence. Earth turned into a run away incubator for mammals after the Sslelkians almost cracked the mantle with an asteroid," he said as he sat down in Jeff's chair.

"What about your species?" I asked.

He smiled and settled into the chair, pulling his large bushy tail around next to his body, "We were an uplifted species that got too big for our britches," he said.

"Uplifted?" I asked.

"Genetically designed by the Torq, another reptilian species. They wanted a slave race and they got more than they bargained for. We revolted, wiped them out and took their technology for ourselves," he said. "When we went out into space we ended up coming into conflict with quite a few other reptilian species who thought what we did was some kind of sin. Eventually we found the Meirrians and found that we got along with them. Of course they try not to think about our origins too much."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"Because they practice their own brand of genetic engineering. They create artificial people out of genetic material that they use as a subject people; workers, soldiers, and even for personal pleasure. They're called replicants."

"Artificial people?" I asked.

"That's what they call them. Since they are grown in vats and not born from a womb they consider them artificial. It's a distinction I don't understand," he said.

I nodded, and replied, "Neither do I. If it has human genetics, if it has a mind, and a soul, then it's a real person."

"That is my people's general consensus as well. But we don't criticize our neighbors," he said. "We just grant freedom to any replicant that seeks it in our space," he replied.

I smiled and said, "Wonderful, the inergalactic version of Abraham Lincoln is a squirrel."

He laughed and said, "Pretty much. The reptilian races consider you, them, and us food."

"I bite back," I said.

"I know," he replied. "That is one of the reason I've been watching you."

We sat for a while and simply talked about nothing important until Jeff finally came back downstairs after about an hour. He smiled at me and said, "I'm sorry, he had a bad dream."

"It's okay," I told him. "I understand completely. Maybe we can get together tomorrow evening. I've got some leads I want to check out during the day."

He nodded, and said, "Let me at least take you home."

I shook my head and said, "My car's outside."

He gave me a nod and said, "Okay. Maybe another time." I got the feeling that he was sort of new at the whole flirting thing as I headed toward the door.

"You could tell me how to get out of the subdivision though," I said.

He laughed and said, "Turn right out of the driveway and stay on Salano Prado until it hits Old Cutler Road. Turn right on Old Cutler until it takes you to North Kendale Drive. Turn left and follow that to the Highway."

I nodded and said, "Thanks. And I'll be sure to take you up on that ride home sometime."

He smiled and asked, "How about dinner tomorrow night?"

"As Sun Dancer or as Jeff?" I asked.

He laughed, "I guess it would be better as Jeff."

"Okay, as long as I get to treat you. Meet me at my hotel at seven?" I reached into my shirt pocket and handed him a card with my MicroTAC number on it. "If you need me, this is my mobile number."

"You have one of those brick things?" he asked. "I'll be glad when Terran technology catches up with Meirrian."

I smiled and showed him my small black folding phone in my shirt pocket. By today's standards it was a big clunky thing, but back then it was top of the line. I grinned and said, "It's not quite a Star Trek communicator, but we're getting there."

He laughed and said, "I'll give you a call if I can't make it. Otherwise I'll see you there."

I nodded and headed out.

The next day I spent most of the morning running down leads on where the attacks occurred. I came to the conclusion that the attacker was having to use his enhanced shifter senses to get into position to be able to attack. One of the attacks literally occurred on the eighth floor of a busy dorm on the Hurricane Campus. I spent a great deal of time looking over the area with my other sight in hopes of getting some kind of indication of what kind of spells he was using to cover his tracks.

At the dorm, I found signs of claw marks on the bricks about two stories up. At another site, an office building where the third victim worked, I found the traces of a couple of spells used, but I couldn't place exactly what they were. They seemed to be some kind of perception altering magic, but the exact type eluded me.

I spoke with several of the residents and workers at both places and got a little more insight into both girls' personalities. The terms that stuck out to me in both interviews was, "sweet". Both were described as being kind and gentle, and very focused on becoming successful. The first girl was an NROTC member that had just finished her second year of the program. The Rotcée commander was more than cooperative with

me when he found I was a fellow officer. The more I learned about these girls, the more I wanted this killer. I knew we were going to end up in a knock down drag out fight, and I planned to relieve him of several body parts before I was finished with him.

In the afternoon, I started digging into the local nocturnal community. I was surprised with what I found there. The whole community was in chaos, and there were half a dozen factions that were trying to gain control. At this point in time, it looked like the wolves had the upper hand, but there were enough witches and vampires to give them a run for their money. The problem was that most of the vampires were neos, or as Emerald is fond of calling them, dusty-bunny cannon fodder. There were a few kinters, but they seemed to keep their noses out of other people's business.

It was time though that I got to the bottom of what was going on. This weretiger was threatening to bring down the government on all the shifters' heads. I did some snooping around and found out there was no real chancellor so to speak. The whole city had become Balkanized. There were several groups of mages from different backgrounds that were working in a loose confederation. They pretty much had their hands in business community of the city. The werewolves had way too many weak-bloods and they roamed the swamps and everglades. Various pack leaders would sell the services of their pack to different factions. The vampires were in complete control of the seedier aspects of the city, except for drugs. That was in control of the Central American drug cartels, and they had werejaguar muscle to back them up. I think that if I had a couple of years free, I'd give myself leave to clean up the whole cesspool. Of course I didn't know that the city was being set up for exactly that kind of cleaning at the turn of the century- at the hands of the First Pride no less. But that would be then.

This was summer of eighty-nine.

I did some digging and found out that the leader of the mage confederation was an English woman by the name Victoria Newkirk. She was the director of the Miami Historical Preservation Society. She had offices not far from my hotel, and I managed to snag an appointment with her right after lunch.

She was a tall, lush woman in her early thirties with long black hair and very blue eyes. There was something very strange and compelling about her that set my senses on edge. I could feel some very old and some very powerful magic in the room as I entered. There was much more to this woman that met the eye. Looking at her with my other sight I realized just what it was; she was a very rare duck indeed.

I smiled and said, "Thank you for seeing me on such short notice, Ms. Newkirk."

"Miss," she said. "I have no use for that particular modern feminist term. If those who insisted on its use were really after equal opportunities for all women, then I'd respect it."

I smiled at the comment. Either she was who I suspected she was, or she wanted me to think that. It really didn't matter, what I was interested in finding out, would benefit us both either way. "I've come to ask for some information about the local, shall we say eclectic community."

She gave me lush smile, full of the promise of pleasure and lust. I could see her slightly sharp canines behind the ruby red lips. If ever there was a woman who could match one of Freyja's in that regard, this woman might just be able to do it. But I saw a movie when I was teenager whose title summed up my attitude on that particular

score: *Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things*. "What do you wish to know, Lieutenant Greenbough?"

"You know who I am?" I asked.

"I would not have survived as long as I have if I didn't keep up on the news of the nocturnal community, Lieutenant. Your involvement in that recent unfortunate events involving several members of my family in Birmingham has not escaped me, nor have the events of the Night of the Howls," she said.

"Well, my involvement with Mary was more of a tertiary thing. I only helped her son and granddaughter stop her from throwing off the entire Geas of the Council of Whispers and exposing us all. It has become too thin on this side of the Atlantic as it is," I told her.

She smiled and said, "Don't worry Mr. Greenbough, I have no complaints about what you have done. It needed to be done, I'm only sorry that it took my grandson that long to act."

I smiled and said, "I think it had something to do with the fact that it meant killing his own mother."

"I think you may be right. But how can I help you now?" she asked.

"I'm hunting a weretiger," I told her.

"Besides yourself, there have been two in Miami of late. There will be another in a few years, but he is yet but a child," she said. "He is from your line."

I raised my eyebrow and asked, "My line?"

"He is the biological offspring of someone you infected," she said with a smile.

"Alec has been to Miami?"

"A few years ago, he was here at the behest of the new Chancellor of Birmingham. He was young and the woman was willing. She just never told him that she was married," Miss Newkirk said. "I'm unsure if he even knows he has a son. I believe it is the nature of your kind to take your pleasure where you can find it, and then leave."

"I don't think Alec Frostbridge is who I am looking for," I said.

She shook her head and gestured toward a well padded chair for me. Smiling she said, "I don't either. You are here about the murders."

I nodded my head and said, "Yes, ma'am."

"There has been another weretiger in town. One with a much darker soul than your Alec," she said. "He calls himself Kamal Khan."

I chuckled and said, "He thinks he's a Bond villain?"

"Louis Jourdan, he is not," she said. "He is handsome, he is rich, but he is not as sophisticated as that particular character. There is a dark evil in his soul that cannot be covered up by any number of layers of civilization. He is a necromancer, and a weretiger, Sumatran I believe."

I nodded. That confirmed my own theory. "Do you know where I can find him?" I asked.

"Why?" she asked in return.

"Because he's crossed the line. I'm going to kill him, and probably with a great deal of relish," I told her.

She smiled and said, "I always did appreciate the blunt honesty of Freyja's Chosen. I know that he has an estate on Fisher Island near the marina. Whether or not he's

there is up to speculation. I would say by now, he knows there's another weretiger in town. He does not like competition."

I nodded my head and said, "That would put Alec's son in jeopardy."

"Not in this case, Lieutenant. I have taken measures to protect young master Carpenter. He will be very important for something that is to come in a few years," she told me. "I will not let him become a pawn in someone else's game just yet. He will be needed later."

"Why do I get the feeling that there is something major developing in the nocturnal community and nobody will tell me what it is?" I said.

"The best way to keep a secret is to tell nobody," she said.

I nodded as she confirmed my suspicion. Well if it was something I needed to know about, my Lady would make me aware of it when the time came. "Can you give me an address on this Kamal Khan" I asked trying not to snicker at the name. Hey, I'll be the first to admit that code names can run from the sublime to the ridiculous, but taking the name of a Bond villain is just going too damn far. I wondered if the Fleming estate would be likely to sue.

She nodded and wrote the address down and handed it to me. It was in a very tight and neat script that spoke volumes of the personality behind it. "I wish you the best, Lieutenant. Kamal Khan has caused no end of consternation in the nocturnal community here in Miami. It's going to take me years to get it where it needs to be."

"And where is that?" I asked.

She smiled and said, "Where the forces that we are bringing to bear will do their most good. A piece of unsolicited advice, Lieutenant: pay close attention to Miami, and New Orleans. The forces that will come out of these two cities will eventually rock the world all the way to the stars. Do not interfere, but pay attention."

That was about as ominous it came, and if this woman was who I thought she was, I was definitely going to heed her warnings. "Thank you ma'am," I told her.

"Oh, and good luck, Lieutenant," she said as I left the room.

An hour and half later I was at the address she indicated on Fisher Island. It didn't take much for me to find the place. I knew most humans couldn't smell it, but it reeked to Valhalla of tiger spoor. The son of a bitch had actually marked his territory, physically warning any others off.

I considered playing who could piss higher up on the tree with him, but this was recon, not search and destroy- at least not yet. I knew how to hide my own spoor and went to the trouble to do it. I drove by the house several times. It was a very nice luxury home, of the cookie cutter variety that were popping up all over the country. A very nice BMW was sitting in the driveway. I used my othersight to see what wards and such were on the property.

It was teeming with protections, some of them subtle, and some of down right deadly. The wards were effective but for the most part they were overkill. The things he would have to do to avoid tripping them himself made them too much trouble to use in any situation other than an outright siege. This told me that the man was suffering from a severe case of obsessive compulsive disorder and probably paranoia as well. It was some good insight into how he thought.

I could also tell that he was no longer on the premises. I had no idea when he would return. I waited and watched for nearly three hours, but there was no sign of him. I wondered if he'd spotted me. I called Enkoff, and left a message with what I'd found out so far; a name and an address. I also warned him about the mystical traps but somehow I got the feeling he wouldn't pay attention. I was careful to leave Miss Newkirk's involvement out. That meant the information I gave him probably wouldn't stand up in a court of law, but we all knew that it wouldn't end up there anyway.

Finally, I left and headed back to the hotel to meet with Jeff and tell him what I had found out. He would have more resources to bring to bear in this situation, than I did anyway. With traffic, I barely made it back by five thirty. I made a few phone calls. One was to Alec, but I had to leave a message there. The second was to my mom. I wanted her input on a few things, and to let her know I was on TDY, and then called the General to make report. By the time I was finished with that, I had time for a quick shower and shave before heading down.

True to his word, he was there on time and with a big smile. "What's up?" I asked as we sat down at the restaurant.

"That message you left for Enkoff, just about sent him into apoplectic fits. He's looking for some way of getting into that house without getting himself cursed, or killed, or worse."

"So Enkoff's a true believer?" I asked in surprised.

"Oh yeah. Right now he's so afraid of voodoo curses that he's pretty much ready to turn the whole mess over to you and me," Jeff said as the waitress arrived to take our orders.

Five minutes later, after she'd taken our drink and appetizer order, he said, "I'm sorry about the other night. Kendall doesn't usually have nightmares."

"It's okay," I told him. "I never have a problem with a parent taking care of his or her child."

"Does that happen often?" he asked.

"I've had a few lovers with children in the past," I told him.

"Is that where this is going?" he asked as the waitress delivered our beers. The nice thing about this restaurant was that they had a whole lot more on tap than just the usual Bud, Miller, and Pabst.

"Depends on where you want it to go," I said.

"Male lovers?" he asked. "With children?"

I nodded, and said, "One or two. I usually try to stick with people my own age, so there aren't that many."

"Thought you didn't mess with what wasn't yours," he said with a smile.

"I don't, but you're not alone in the world of being a single parent. You are however among the few that I respect," I told him.

"Don't you think we should be out chasing the villain instead of flirting over a beer?" he asked with a smile.

"Do you know where to look? I've been looking all day, and I know where he lives. I can't be a one man stake out. I turned it over to the authorities. Now I wait for more information," I said.

He nodded and smiled. "Just wanted to make sure you had your priorities straight."

"Straight?" I asked him. "They're in order. This isn't about love, Jeff. This is about finding comfort and a little fun. If you're looking for love, you're going to have to look somewhere else."

He sipped his beer and looked me in the eye. "I've had and still have love. It was the greatest thing in my life. I lost it to a son of bitch with a suit of power armor and no sense of right and wrong. I have companionship; Dreamweaver is my former brother in law. Skyhawke is a partner, Kendor is a mentor, Tavi is a friend, and Leighanne, well Leighanne is as close to family as I think I can ever have short of Kendall. I have a wonderful bright, intelligent son. I have plenty of love in my life.

What I could use is a little playtime in the sack. I knew you weren't the settling down kind when I talked to Night Angel. You confirmed it yesterday, and you confirmed it again."

"Just answer me one question then," I said.

"What?"

"A man with your looks, and your background should have no problem finding companionship. Why me?" I asked.

"Because you're available, there are no strings attached, and because I know I can trust you around my kid, and Leighanne," he said. He smiled and said, "Now you answer me one question."

"What?"

"Top or bottom?"

I smiled and said, "Top- most of the time."

"Good he said," sipping his beer again as our appetizer arrived. "And eat up, you're going to need your strength."

An hour and six beers later, we were inside my hotel room stretched out on the big queen-sized bed in our boxers. Jeff Anderson was a damn good kisser, probably one of the best I've ever kissed. I won't say it had been a while since I'd been with another man. It had just been a while since I'd been with another man that wasn't me. Like I said, the power granted to me by the Lord of the Alfs was useful for when nobody else was available

He was also eager as hell. I got the feeling that it really had been a while since he'd been with anyone else. I sat up and looked down the length of his body. When they invented the word "twink" they had Jeffery Anderson in mind. His body was long, lithe, smooth and very well built. His blond hair was slightly mussed and I could see the lust in his deep blue eyes. He had a small paisley-shaped birthmark just above the waist band of his boxers.

With a grin I ran my hand along the hard surface of his legs noting that even the fine hair of his legs was soft and thin. Trailing my finger up the length of his well defined thighs I reveled in the feel of the hard muscle under my fingertips. I reached up and slipped my hand into the fly of his boxers and pulled out the length of hardening cock I found in there.

I was a bit surprised to find out that like myself he was uncut, but then realized that his grandfather must have taken him off planet at a very early age. He was about six or six and half inches long with a wide purple head that reminded me of a barrel on its

side. There was a small drop of precum leaking from the slit at the top, and I ducked my head and licked from the top of his balls all the way to where the head flared wide.

Then I dipped my tongue in to taste him. It was salty and sweet both, with that musky taste of hormones that tended to set my motor running.

As I slowly stretched my mouth down to the base of his cock, feeling his pubes tickle my nose, an invisible force gently picked me up and rotated my body until my legs were straddling either side of his head. Telekinesis had its uses beyond just opening locks I guessed.

I worked my way up and down the length of flesh in my mouth, enjoying the scents rising from the small patch curls that were sticking out of the fly of his shorts. I felt the cool hotel air across the head of my dick as he pulled it from the fly of my shorts, then there was the warmth of his mouth as he began to suck the length.

We stayed like that for a while, only the slight slurping sounds of mouth against manhood breaking the general silence. Finally, in frustration, he pulled my cock from his mouth and said, "To hell with this. We need to lose the boxers."

I nodded, reluctantly took his dick from my mouth, stood by the bed and dropped my shorts while watching him wiggle out of his. I could see where he'd shaved his balls and trimmed his pubes down to a small section just at the base of his dick. I licked my lips as I gazed down at him.

He on the other hand wasted no time pulling me back to him. This time, I stretched out along his body as he ran his fingers down my chest, playing with the thick mat of coppery curls that covered my pecs, and then made a line down my stomach to disappear into my own pubes. Once again, he kissed me pulling me tight against his own hard body. Our dicks pressed against each other as they were trapped between our bodies.

After a few moments, I rolled over on top of him and began to kiss my way down his body again. I nibbled on his hard nipples while letting my hand drop lower to begin stroke his dick. I kissed lower, letting my tongue make a path down to the patch of blond curls. Raising my head up, I kissed the end of his manhood before stretching my mouth all the way down over its length.

I spent several moments giving him a long luxurious blow job. It felt good to let the world slip away and to simply get lost in arms of a beautiful young man. As I felt his body begin to respond, I started to run a finger down below his balls into the crack of his ass. I found what I was looking for and pressed gently, feeling my digit sink in. He began to squirm under me and I shifted around so I was sitting between his thighs.

Stroking his cock with one hand, I lifted his knees onto my shoulders and began to lick around his balls. When my tongue dipped into the cleft of his ass to probe at his opening I thought he was going to twist right off my shoulders. I pulled him back down by his cock as I plunged my tongue into his ass.

After a few moments, I replaced my tongue with a finger, then two. All the while, he was squirming around driving himself down onto the fingers. When I was sure he was ready, I reached over by the night stand and pulled out a tube of lube and began to spread it around his opening. When I was sure I had him good and slick, I applied more to my own dick, and then raised up.

With a slow steady pressure I entered him watching his face for signs of pain. Not seeing any, I buried myself up to my pubes in his ass and began slowly fuck him. Leaning down, I kissed him and asked, "How's this?"

He smiled up and kissed me back. Between breaths he said, "I've needed this for a while now." His hands began to pull hard on my ass as I leaned back up and began to stroke his dick.

It wasn't long before he was shooting ropey white streams of cum up along his well defined abs and across that perfectly smooth chest. I looked down and asked him, "Do you want me to stop?"

"Hell no," he said. "I can come at least one more time. Besides, I don't think you're finished."

I laughed and said, "No, I'm not." Then I went back to long luxurious strokes in and out of his tight ass. It wasn't long before I saw his cock begin to rise again, and he locked his ankles behind my back. With a giggle and and a wink he began to run his foreskin down and then back over his cock head, and said, "Harder."

I raised an eyebrow and still wary of my own strength, I began to plow into him harder and faster. His hand became a blur on his dick as I leaned forward on my palms and really began to fuck him. I could feel my ears begin to melt up the side of my head and my tail began to lash out behind me. I could feel my balls pull up close to my body and with a final burst of speed I thrust deep inside him filling him with my cum. I felt something warm and wet hit my chest and chin and looked down to see his second orgasm splashing across his face and my upper body.

"Do you always begin to shift during sex?" he asked licking his own cum off my nipple.

Bending down I kissed him and said, "Only when it's good. Didn't mean to scare you."

"Didn't scare me," he said. "I thought it was kind of sexy. Your shields dropped some too when you came."

Pulling out of him, I stretched out along side his body and began to play with his sweat-soaked hair. "I'll keep that in mind," I told him as he began to run his fingers along my chest.

"Who's Alec?" he asked. I gave him a long look but said nothing. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry. It's just that his name and image popped into your head when you came."

I snorted and said, "Alec is a friend and a lover. He's the reason I used so much lube on you."

"He's the reason you know about being able to infect someone through rape?" he asked.

I shook my head and said, "No. He's the reason I know that I can infect someone through rough sex, or not using enough lube. Let's just say that soap doesn't make a good lubricant."

He nodded and said, "Sorry, I didn't mean to imply that you did anything wrong."

I smiled and said, "Actually, I did do something wrong. I should have thought about it. I should have realized it was a possibility. Luckily for us, he was excited about the idea of becoming a weretiger."

"Excited?" he asked.

I nodded and said, "Alec was gang raped by a group of Directive Werewolves who killed his parents." That of course was a story I had to drag out of Emory with cold iron and a hard dick. She wasn't about to give up anything personal about another lover until she was sure I was cool with everything that happened- between all three of us.

"How did he avoid getting killed or infected?" Jeff asked.

"Because he was a very good mage, even at thirteen," I said. "When a friend of mine was finished with him, he could hold his own in a werewolf battle. Stripped one of them of his pelt and never laid a hand on him."

"He was gang raped at thirteen?" Jeff asked.

I nodded and said, "Sometimes the nocturnal community is not very nice. It's why I'm here," I told him. "When things go bump in the night, it's my job to bump back-hard."

He began to run his hand along my chest and down my flanks. Pulling me to him, he asked, "Are you up for another round?"

I grinned at him and grabbed the lube. We made love four more times that night before he finally left for home around two in the morning. It was good. It was fun, and it was just what I needed to get my mind back on the mission.

The next morning, I got a call around nine. I was on my way over to see if I could get anything else out Enkoff when my phone rang. "Greenbough," I said after flipping the device open.

"Get over here, we've got a problem," Jeff said to me.

"What problem?" I asked.

"I know who his next target is," Jeff said. I had a sinking feeling in my gut.

"Who?" I asked warily.

"Leighanne. Get over here, she's got a tale to tell."

"I'll be there in thirty," I said.

Hanging up, I called Enkoff and told him I had a surprise lead I was following up on. He wasn't happy about the reschedule, but he was enough of a professional to know that sometimes these things happened.

Less than an hour later, I was sitting in Jeff's dining room and Leighanne was telling me what had happened that day at the beach.

"I guess it all started the other day when I took Kendall to the beach. We ran into a guy, and I mean literally ran into him because Kendall knocked over his soda. I bought him another one and didn't think anything about it. But he was there again today when I went without Kendall," she said hugging her arms.

"Could it have been a coincidence?" I asked.

She shook her head and said, "That's what I told myself at first. I was wearing my new bikini, you know the one that my mom doesn't know about, and was just hanging out with some friends. I noticed him again. I guess the reason I noticed him was that he wearing some really expensive clothes, I mean nobody wears Gucci shoes to the beach, not unless they've got money to throw away."

"Anyway, Miranda's sister, Ginger pointed him out and said that he was cute. I remember seeing him, and I remember thinking that he looked nice, but there was something about his eyes that made me nervous- like he was sizing me up for a meal."

"I told her that he was okay, but not anything really special," she said. "He must have heard me, even though he was twenty feet away, because suddenly I was hit with this huge irrational rage. He nearly knocked me down with it. At the time I just shrugged it off and went on to the mall with Miranda and the rest of my friends," she said.

"In the bikini?" I asked her.

"No silly, I had a pair of shorts and top to put on over it," she told me. "But we ran into him again there. This time I got a good look at his mind, and it was horrible! He was enjoying stalking somebody and was looking forward to..." she turned a little pale at the memory. Jeff reached out and put a protective arm around her. She turned into his chest and started sobbing. "He was stalking me, I could see it in his mind."

"Listen to me, Leighanne," I said. "This is very important. How did you get home?"

She looked up and said, "I told Miranda what I thought, and she just nodded. She said she was getting the same vibe off him too."

"What do you mean the same vibe?" I asked.

"Miranda's a telepath too," she said. "She said she got the same worry. We decided to split up and then call each other when we got home safely."

"Where does she live?" I asked.

"She lives down in the keys with her brother. He's a SEAL," she said.

"Her brother?" I asked.

"Yeah, Lieutenant Commander Heller. Actually, he's her adopted brother. Their dad was the Commandant at the Naval Academy," she told me.

I nodded my head. I knew exactly who she was talking about and realized the girl would be safe. Nobody messed with Anchor and stayed in one piece, except me of course. Turning back to her I asked, "How did you get home?"

I took the cross town bus all the way out to Carlton," she said. "He got on the same bus and followed."

I gave her a confused look and said, "I don't know Miami that well."

"It's literally on the other side of the city," Jeff told me.

She nodded and said, "I ducked into the ladies room of the coffee shop over on Carter, and teleported to the high school here, and then took a cab to the PF-1 headquarters, and found Jeff."

I gave Jeff another questioning look and he said, "She's on my list of people to let in to see me. She is after all my son's baby-sitter."

"I think she's more than that," I told him. He shrugged but didn't offer anything else. I turned back to her and said, "You did the right thing. You did all the right things to get him off your tail. Now the question is how to keep him off yours, and maybe put him on mine."

"Yours?" she asked and then looked up to Jeff questioningly. I wondered just how much he had told her about what happened last night between us.

I nodded and said, "Yeah, mine. I want to set a trap for him."

"How she asked."

"A little trick my mother taught me," I told her holding out my hand. "Let me have your hand." Again, she looked up at Jeff and waited. He nodded and she gave me her hand. I smiled and said, "Watch."

I felt the memory of the touch and I let myself start to shift into my normal form, but shunted it into the memory. I felt my skin start to crawl off my bones and reshape itself. The world around me shrank and my clothes were suddenly way too big for me. Jeff and Leighanne looked on with surprise.

"Do you still have that bikini?" I asked.

By two o'clock I was back at the beach wearing my new form, and Leighanne's bikini. At first she was embarrassed to give it to me, saying she hadn't washed it yet. I told her that was a good thing because it still had her scent on it. It would take a while for me to develop her scent and the bikini would help mask that at first. Then I saw the bikini.

No wonder she didn't want her mother to see it. Damn thing was little more than a piece of dental floss and two band aids. I felt like I was walking around on the beach naked. At least I was wearing an attractive body. For a twelve year old, Leighanne was very attractive and very well built. I also noticed that the body I was wearing had a familiar paisley shaped birth mark on its lower stomach.

Most men would have a problem with being seen like this. For me it wasn't a problem. I was used to thinking of other people as a sex object and was comfortable with being treated that way myself. To quote the Great Bird of the Galaxy, "I've been used as a sex object in the past, and find it to be great fun." Freyja made us pretty for a reason and northmen don't shirk behind false modesty.

The beach was packed with kids on summer break and I spent a great deal of time, several hours actually, being watched and seen. In a couple of cases, I even flirted with several of the older boys, probably much more than Leighanne would have. I don't think she'd yet come to realize the power of her own sexuality. It as fun being a prick tease for a while. It also had the effect I wanted on the body I was wearing.

By the time the sun was beginning to sink low behind the city I knew I was being watched. I stayed with the last few stragglers on the beach, waiting. It took a while to get rid of a few of the boys who were convinced they were going to get lucky with a hot babe in a bikini. One in particular was persistent. He was tall, blonde, and built like a body builder. He kept flexing his muscles to be impressive. Too bad the boy had no idea how female sexual response really worked. But then again, he was only about fifteen or sixteen so I could cut him some slack. If I hadn't been on a mission, I might have taken him up on it. I honestly considered the possibilities for a leave some time.

I finally has to mention that my boyfriend was picking me up in a few minutes to get rid of him. He managed to leave me his phone number though.

By the time it was dark on the beach, and I'd finally gotten rid of Mr. Pecs, it was getting near nine o'clock. I looked over and sure enough I caught sight of Leighanne's stalker. As I was ambling down the beach toward a deserted section, I could see him following along about a quarter mile back. I didn't have the advantage of her telepathy, but I still had my enhanced senses, and could tell it was who I was looking

for. I wasn't sure where Sun Dancer was, but I knew he was around. I could feel him brushing against my mind every now and again to make sure I was okay.

Finding a nice section of beach that was hidden behind a construction site where a couple of high rise hotels were going up, I sat down with my feet in the water and waited. When my stalker disappeared out of my sight, I knew he was getting ready to strike. I forced my body to relax, and slowed my heart rate. I didn't want anything to give away that I knew he was coming up from behind me. I felt the hair on the back of my neck suddenly stand on end as he released his predator. I also felt something lock down on my mind. Some kind of compulsion to not move. He *was* using magic. It was strong, and it was centered on my vocal cords. I figured it was so I couldn't call for help.

As I heard him rushing up behind me, I rolled to the side and watched him dive head long into the surf. He hadn't even changed into his battle form yet. I came up into a defensive stance and let my mind relax the hold it had on my form. I felt my body shift into what it was supposed to be, and poor Leighanne's bikini could not take the strain of my larger size.

As Khan came up spitting salt water he looked at me in shock. I guess really was a sight to see standing there. He'd attacked a twelve or thirteen year old girl in a bikini.

When he came out of his pounce he was facing a twenty-six year old male magecat, complete with fur, tail, and ears. He screamed something unintelligible into the night and began to flow up into his battle form; fourteen or so feet of anthropomorphic Sumatran weretiger. He as much smaller and thinner than my Siberian form. I just smiled and shifted up into my own battle form, and loomed over him.

Suddenly the air next to me split and Sun Dancer arrived his psi-sword buzzing angrily as it lit up the night. "You owe her a new bikini," he said with a smile.

I tried to say something, but the compulsion for silence was still on me. I just grinned and leaped at Khan. He dodged out of the way and threw a clumsy back claw my way. I grabbed it and locked down. With a great heave, I lifted him by that back claw and brought him around in a hundred and eighty degree arc to slam into the sand.

He hit with a hard thud and rolled toward Sun Dancer, claws and teeth flailing. In one of the most elegant moves I'd ever seen in my life, the Gem Corpsman danced out of the way and lashed out with his blade. I could smell burning flesh and fur as the blade cut deep into side of his face, both burning and blasting away the skin. That sword was devastating.

Khan screamed again and covered his face as his eye bubbled away. I leapt back into the fray, slashing at him with claws as he tried to scramble away. I felt them bite deep into the back of his leg. He spun around and kicked out at me, catching my upper shoulder with a nasty slash that opened an eighteen inch gash across my chest, and pushed me away from him.

Sun Dancer glided in under the kick and again his blade buzzed angrily as Khan continued his roll toward the water. Again there was the smell of burning flesh and the weretiger scrambled away screaming as the blade lashed down between his legs.

Something went "plop" into the water and I realized that it was part of his manhood as well as most of his tail.

Suddenly something blindsided me, and I felt a massive force pin my arms to my side and lift me into the sky. Looking over, I saw Sun Dancer similarly caught in a beam of light coming from above us. Looking down, I saw Khan struggling to his feet and heading South down the beach clutching his damaged face with one hand and his crotch with the other. If I could have, I would have begun to curse.

Several moments later, I found myself in what could only be described as some kind of legal hearing. Three women, and two men sat at a large raised judge's bench; all were wearing the same kind of crystal at their throats that Jeff wore. Sun Dancer, Kendor, Tavi, Leighanne, and Kendall were all standing at another table looking confused. Off to the side were two others, a man and a woman. I noticed that Sun Dancer's sword was lying on the bench.

Some kind of hearing was going on, but I could understand none of it. It was frustrating. I shifted down to my base form, to see if I could at least shake the spell preventing me from speaking, but it was to no avail. I would have to wait on it to wear off or until I could find a way to break it. In the meantime I found myself standing and watching a drama I couldn't understand nor could I move to assist my companions.

I watched as the man off to the side stepped forward. He began reading off something but I could not understand what he was saying. Most of it seemed to be directed toward Kendor. The man reading it had a sneer on his face that spoke volumes. I didn't have to hear the details to know that this was payback of some kind.

Kendor spoke up, but he was silenced by one of the men at what I assumed was the judge's bench.

The woman off to the side began to speak, and seemed to appeal to the "judges". At one point, she pointed to where I was standing in all of my naked glory and unable to move. Every eye turned and looked me up and down. All I could do is stand there and glare.

The man who'd first spoken said something, and then Jeff spoke up. The sneering bastard visibly backed down at whatever Jeff said. Leighanne was called up to speak with "judges" and something seemed to pass between them. Nothing was said, but I could tell there was a lot of mental conversation going on by the set of her shoulders. She reminded me of the way Emory would stand when she used her telepathy.

Each of my companions were called to the "bench" and they seemed to speak at great length, either telepathically or in the sing-song language that I couldn't understand. An argument ensued, and I could tell that threats were made, and then counter threats. Finally some kind of agreement was reached, and Jeff was led out, his head hanging down. I struggled against whatever force was holding me. I think I was making progress when suddenly one of the judges looked at me, the crystal at her throat glowed. I felt my shields shatter and then there was darkness.

I came to on Jeff's sofa. Tavi was sitting quietly in the chair across from me. When I sat up suddenly, he looked over at me and asked, "How do you feel?"

Shaking my head, I said, "Fine, just confused. What happened?" It was at this point I realized that the spell had worn off and I could speak.

"Meirrian politics involving itself in Gem Corps business. Nothing good is going to come from this. Trust me," he said shaking his tiny head.

"Where's Jeff?" I asked suspiciously.

"He's upstairs, recovering from the surgery," he said.

"What surgery?" I asked.

"They stripped him of his powers," Tavi said bitterly. "The misbegotten sons of Khetians stripped him of his powers and drummed him out of the Corps"

"What? Why?" I asked swinging my legs around and realizing that I was still nude under the blanket they'd lain over me. "What's going on, Tavi?"

"It's my fault," I heard Kendor say as he came through the door with my clothes.

"How is it your fault?" I asked.

"I cheated," Kendor said. "I needed a Corpsman from Earth and there wasn't one, so I cheated. I created one."

I took the slacks and shirt from him and began to get dressed right there. "Explain," I demanded.

"The Corps wanted a Terran with a strong psionic gift. They told me to find one and bring him to Meirria to be trained. Well, there aren't a hell of a lot of Terrans with a strong psionic gift. First Shadu, and then the Directive have made sure of that all through the centuries. The gift is only now starting to come back with any strength.

About twelve years ago I found a couple with a child that had a strong gift- a very strong gift."

"Wait a minute, Jeff's a lot older than twelve," I said.

"Not really," he told me. Like I said, I cheated. The baby I found was Leighanne, but I'm not about to take up baby snatching, no matter what anyone tells me," he said.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I snuck in and got a cell sample. It wasn't hard to clone the sample from there," he said.

"But Jeff is male," I said.

"So? It doesn't take much to switch a single chromosome. Actually, I switched several, and fast grew the fetus so I could train him more easily. And I did such a good job of it, not even he knew the difference," Kendor said. "And he was the greatest that the Corps had seen since the founding."

"So, what's the problem? I asked.

"Jeff is a replicant, and replicants are not only not allowed to be members of the Corps, they're considered to be property. This wouldn't have been a problem if Kendor here hadn't exposed Senator Tiell's father of corruption about thirty years ago. He's been digging for something to get Kendor on ever since. He started digging into Jeff's background and came up with the documents to prove what happened. Tiell, demanded that Corps destroy the replicant, the original, and the offspring."

"What?!" I turned and stared in disbelief at what he was suggesting.

"Tiell overstepped is bounds," Tavi said. "The Corps may strip Jeff of his powers, and they did that reluctantly. The Council bent the rules until they nearly broke to keep it at just that, but they weren't about to kill an innocent, and definitely not a child."

"Tiell argued that there were no innocents, and that Meirrian law had been violated," Kendor said. "In the end, Jeff offered himself to save his son and Leighanne. But not even the Corps wanted to deal with the fallout of executing one of their most decorated

heroes for a crime over which he had no control. So they voted to strip him of his powers and his status as a Gem Corpsman. They surgically burned out the parts of his brain that gave him his psionics."

"My Gods! And people call us barbarians!" I said. What kind of twisted messed up stupid Empire are these Meirrians?" I demanded.

"They just better make sure I never get my hands on any of them," I heard Leighanne say from the door. She looked like she had been crying and had Kendall by one hand and was holding somethign else in her other. It was Jeff's gem.

"It wasn't the Corps, Leighanne," Kendor said.

"They stripped Jeff of his powers because he's a clone, my clone. They stripped you of your status in the Corps too, Kendor. I hate them, and with good reason," she said.

I looked over at Kendor and said, "Girl's got a point, Kendor."

"You're not helping here, Lieutenant," Kendor added.

"I'm not trying to help. I agree with her, and if she needs any help, I'll be glad to lend it," I told him. Then sitting down I asked, "Is Jeff all right?"

"He'll be going through psychic withdrawal for a while. I've already informed Director Kirk that Sun Dancer won't be returning to Paraforce 1."

"What about Khan?" I asked suddenly remembering why I was here in the first place.

Kendor shook his head, "I don't know. You'll have to talk to Detective Enkoff, yourself."

I nodded and reached for my cell phone. Dialing Enkoff's number I waited for him to answer. "Enkoff, any word on Khan? He got away from me last night?"

"Is this the way you usually run an investigation, Greenbough?" he demanded.

"Detective, trust me, I had very little choice in the situation," I said calmly.

"Last anyone saw of him, he was on a fast moving boat pulling out of Biscayne Bay. We've managed to connect him with a couple of Columbians and got a judge to let us seized his house under the RICO laws. I'm still worried about those traps you told us about, though." He seemed to calm down for a moment- at least long enough to ask, "Can you help us out with those?"

"I'll see what I can do. Listen, Sun Dancer has been severely injured. He won't be returning to the case."

"He didn't get bit did he?" Enkoff asked, some genuine concern in his voice.

"No. He'll be okay, he's just going to be out of it for a while. I'll be down later today and we'll go over what can be done about those spells," I told him.

"Okay, thanks for you help," he said. "And tell Sun Dancer, I hope he gets to feeling better."

"Will do," I told him. "I'll talk to you later, Detective." Closing my phone, I looked over at the others and said, "Khan got away. But Jeff and I both hurt him badly. I don't think he'll be back to Miami any time soon. But if he is, call me."

I spent the next week cleaning out the wards on Khan's house. I spent another week talking with Jeff. I was worried that he might do something stupid. He surprised me though. On about the third day, I found him in a basement lab of his place tinkering. "I may not have my powers any more, but I can still fight," he said.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm putting together a new sword, a shield, and some armor," he said. "They took away my powers, not my training and not my ability to fight."

I nodded and thought that this was a good attitude. He was focused on what he could still do, not what he couldn't. Some people are heroes without powers.